

# PERSPECTIVE

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## **Communist Party of Vietnam Leadership Appointments - The Geography Factor**

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Early indications show that Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc (left) and Tran Quoc Vuong (right), will be possible candidates for the position of general secretary. The inclusion of Nguyen Xuan Phuc, who comes from the Centre, indicates a break from the established practice.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) installs its personnel based on criteria such as competence, experience, age limits, gender and geographical origins. The last factor significantly affects the personnel line-up.
- Historically, two political geographic regions were formed around the feuding armies of Trinh and Nguyen starting from 1620. In 1834, a Nguyen king (Minh Mang) divided the country into three regions – North, Centre and South. The French colonial government essentially maintained this division until 1945.
- From 1954 to 1975, Vietnam was divided into North and South Vietnam. These divisions, feudal clashes and the wars of resistance against foreign powers further shaped the centres of power in Vietnam.
- After Vietnam’s reunification in 1975, the CPV leadership took into account geographical origins in its personnel line-up by seeking a balance among leaders from the North, the Centre and the South, following the tradition established by the Nguyen dynasty.
- To date, the general secretary and prime minister are selected from two different regions. This leadership line-up is a top-down practice that nurtures political groups whose members are connected by their geographical origins.

## INTRODUCTION

The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) will hold its all-important 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress early this year.<sup>1</sup> The 13<sup>th</sup> plenum of the Party's Central Committee in October 2020 made further progress in terms of the personnel preparation for the national congress – coming up with the list of candidates for the central committee of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress term. The 14<sup>th</sup> plenum in December 2020 decided on the list of candidates for the Politburo and Secretariat of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress.

The Politburo further decided to hold the 15<sup>th</sup> plenum just before the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress to deliberate on the list of candidates for the four top national positions (general secretary, prime minister, state president and chairperson of the national assembly).<sup>2</sup> This paper provides an overview of the personnel installation at the national level, with a focus on the geographical dimension of the selection in terms of the practice and criteria used.

## GEOGRAPHICAL DIMENSIONS IN PERSONNEL INSTALLATION

### *The Top National Leadership*

At the national leadership level, the CPV first devised the scheme of “collective leadership” at the 7<sup>th</sup> National Congress in 1991 that comprised the four top positions of the Party's general secretary, state president, prime minister and chairperson of the national assembly.<sup>3</sup> It was also at this same congress that the Party instituted the rule of geographical origins which stipulated that the positions of the general secretary, state president and prime minister must be held by three separate individuals from different geographical parts of Vietnam, i.e. from the North, Centre and South,<sup>4</sup> and that no two individuals are to have come from the same region.<sup>5</sup>

The rule of geographical origins was relaxed somewhat at the 10<sup>th</sup> National Congress in 2006 when the CPV decided that only the general secretary and prime minister need to be from different regional parts of Vietnam. General Secretary Nong Duc Manh, who came from the North, secured a second term, and both the President Nguyen Minh Triet and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung hailed from the South. Similarly, during the 11<sup>th</sup> National Congress term (2011-2016), apart from General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong who came from the North, both President Truong Tan Sang and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung hailed from the South.

At the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress in 2016, the principle that only the general secretary and prime minister need to be from different geographical regions of Vietnam was adhered to. So for the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress term (2016-2021), General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong came from the North while Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc came from the Centre.

At the upcoming 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress, one possible scenario is the continuation of the established practice of having the general secretary and prime minister come from different geographical regions of Vietnam. Another increasingly possible scenario, which will be a break from convention if it comes to pass, is for the general secretary and prime minister to come from the same geographical region. In this scenario, Nguyen Phu Trong will stay on

as general secretary for a third term despite his age and ill health. A possible candidate for prime minister is existing Politburo member Pham Minh Chinh (concurrently secretary of the CPV Central Committee and head of the Party's Organisation Commission) who is from the northern province of Thanh Hoa.<sup>6</sup>

Another question that remains to be answered is whether the post of general secretary and president will remain in the hands of a single individual as is the case at present. The CPV could consider to continue to merge the positions of general secretary and state president in the interest of simplicity and for the sake of diplomacy so that on official trips abroad, the general secretary could be accorded the status of a head of state. The practice of having these two positions held by two separate individuals has been applied since 1945, driven by a primary consideration, i.e. to avoid over-concentration of power and the growth of an individual personality cult.<sup>7</sup>

What is clear is that since the 7<sup>th</sup> National Congress in 1991, there has been a stress on the general secretary being an individual from the North. At the same time, this individual must be "a master in Marxism, Leninism and Ho Chi Minh doctrine".<sup>8</sup> In the upcoming 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress, there were earlier indications that Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Tran Quoc Vuong, current standing member of the CPV's Secretariat, were possible candidates for the position of general secretary. The inclusion of Nguyen Xuan Phuc, who comes from the Centre, would seem to indicate a break from the established practice. However, one latest indication as mentioned above is that Nguyen Phu Trong would be the frontrunner for staying on as general secretary.

Tran Quoc Vuong could be another frontrunner as he has the support of General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong. Tran Quoc Vuong also has experience in fighting corruption as head of the Central Committee on Control and Scrutiny, a post he held from 2016 to 2018. He is more likely to carry on the anti-corruption fight if he becomes general secretary. Another factor is that Tran Quoc Vuong is a Northerner. As mentioned above, the CPV's general secretaries generally come from the North. There is some historical context behind this geographical emphasis. In January 1930, the three communist parties in the North, the Centre and the South of Vietnam, then a French colony, merged into a single party<sup>9</sup> with a majority of the leaders coming from the North. Interestingly, some of these leaders came from what we know today as the CPV's definition of the political North.<sup>10</sup> Even among the CPV rank and file, there is greater representation of members from the North. For instance, among the current 5.4 million party members as of end 2020, more than 60% are from the North.

From the CPV's perspective, the term 'geographical origins' is not merely a narrow construct denoting birthplace or ancestral village but also includes how politically active an individual has been in a particular region. In this regard, General Secretary Le Duan (1960 - 1986) was considered a Southerner even though he was born in Quang Tri, a central province. This was because Le Duan spent a large part of his political career in the South. In the same vein, Nguyen Van Linh who succeeded Le Duan and was general secretary from 1986 to 1991, and who initiated *Doi Moi* (economic renovation), was considered politically a Southerner although his birthplace was in Hung Yen province in the North.

At the moment, there appears to be a nice geographical balance in the top leadership with General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong from the North, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc

being from the Centre, and Chairperson of the National Assembly Madame Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan being from the South. Traditionally, since the 7<sup>th</sup> National Congress, the prime ministers have come from the South, such as Vo Van Kiet (1991-1996), Phan Van Khai (1996-2006), and Nguyen Tan Dung (2006-2016). The primary reason is that since the South has contributed most to the state coffers, it is important to give it due recognition by having the prime minister come from there.<sup>11</sup> But the fundamental reason lies in the CPV's will to enhance political unity and solidarity throughout the country. However, it is worth noting that the current prime minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc is an exception; he is from the Centre. He became prime minister in 2016 since no member of the Politburo in the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress who was from the South satisfied the selection criteria for that position.

*The Politburo and the Secretariat*

In the current Politburo of the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress, we can also discern representation based on the geographical origins of the North, Centre and South. The North has two explicit groups. One comprises Ha Nam, Nam Dinh and Ninh Binh provinces which have contributed five members to the Politburo.<sup>12</sup> This group, especially those from Ha Nam and Nam Dinh, is a closely knitted one. The other consists of Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces which has contributed one member of the Politburo and three members of the Secretariat.<sup>13</sup> They also form a close-knit group. The Centre has contributed one member of the Politburo and one member of the Secretariat.<sup>14</sup> The South has contributed five members of the Politburo and one member of the Secretariat (see [Table 1](#) below).

**Table 1: Members of the Politburo of the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress Term**

	<b>Geographical Regions</b>	<b>Provinces</b>	<b>Politburo (12<sup>th</sup> National Congress term – list all members)</b>	<b>Status</b>
1	North	Nam Dinh	Dinh The Huynh	To Step down
2	North	Ha Nam	Ngo Xuan Lich	To Step down
3	North	Ninh Binh	Tran Dai Quang	Deceased
4	North	Nam Dinh	Pham Binh Minh	To Remain
5	North	Nam Dinh	Dinh La Thang	Prosecuted
6	North	Son La	Ms. Tong Thi Phong	To Step down
7	North	Thai Binh	Tran Quoc Vuong	To be decided
8	North	Ha Noi	Nguyen Phu Trong	To be decided
9	North	Thai Binh	Hoang Trung Hai	To Step down
10	North	Phu Tho	Nguyen Van Binh	To Step down
11	North	Thanh Hoa	Pham Minh Chinh	To Remain
12	North	Hung Yen	To Lam	To Remain
13	North	Nghe An	Vuong Dinh Hue	To Remain
14	Centre	Quang Nam	Nguyen Xuan Phuc	To be decided
15	South	Ben Tre	Ms. Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan	To be decided
16	South	Tra Vinh	Nguyen Thien Nhan	To Step down
17	South	Long An	Truong Hoa Binh	To Step down
18	South	Quang Binh	Truong Thi Mai	To Remain
19	South	Vinh Long	Vo Van Thuong	To Remain

*Source: Various public sources*

There are six other members of the Politburo and one other member of the Secretariat from the North but they are not in any group or quasi-group.<sup>15</sup> In the South, the members of the Politburo and Secretariat do not explicitly form any group. In general, the members of the Politburo and Secretariat tend to originate more from the North. In a way, this enables them to have more power to make changes in the Party and government organisations and personnel at various levels.

In the personnel line-up for the upcoming 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress, all members of the Secretariat of the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress from Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces will be elevated to the Politburo. The other Northern provinces of Ha Nam, Nam Dinh and Ninh Binh can expect to have three or four members of the Politburo, the Centre can expect two or three and the South three or four.

The rest will be elected from the candidates to the Central Committee of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress. Some Central Committee members will also be elected to become members of the Secretariat.

#### *Central Committee*

The current Central Committee of the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress has 180 full members and 20 alternate members.<sup>16</sup> Among the full members are at least 23 members from the Northern group of Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces.<sup>17</sup> This group has the biggest number of members in the Central Committee of the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress. Except for a few who will step down at the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress, most of them will serve in the Central Committee of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress and some of them will be promoted to the Politburo and/or the Secretariat of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress and even the 14<sup>th</sup> National Congress. The other northern group is made up of those from Ha Nam, Nam Dinh and Ninh Binh provinces, and have at least 18 full members on the Central Committee of the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress.<sup>18</sup>

To maintain their presence, both groups must have worked hard in the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> National Congress to be included in the personnel line-up in the current Central Committee, the Politburo and the Secretariat.

At least two members of the Central Committee can recommend or promote one individual as candidate for the Central Committee in the upcoming National Congress.

The usual route is for members of the Central Committee to promote or recommend a number of individuals to form a preliminary list of candidates. Another less common route is for members of the Central Committee from one particular geographical group to recommend or promote an individual who is also in that group in an effort to retain their power and influence. The Central Committee has the so-called central list of recommended individuals; this list is somewhat less affected by the geographical dimension.



## SOME HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The source of the present-day groups that can be discerned to be based on geographical origins has some connections to Vietnam's history. For example, there were two distinct geographical regions that were formed during the feuding war between the Trinh and Nguyen clans (1620 – 1672). In 1802, Nguyen Anh, a young prince, founded the Nguyen dynasty, and in 1834, Minh Mang, a Nguyen emperor, announced the division of Vietnam into three regions: the North, the Centre and the South. From 1887, the French colonialists re-affirmed this division, which lasted until 1945.<sup>19</sup>

Even before the Trinh and Nguyen clans came along, the North was a distinct centre of political power. In particular, the Tran dynasty was founded in Nam Dinh province in 1223. From 1257 to 1288, it defeated the Mongolian Yuan invaders thrice. Over time, and as a result of the victories of the Tran dynasty, the then Nam Dinh prefecture (comprising present-day Hung Yen, Ha Nam, Nam Dinh, and Thai Binh), became a centre of political power in Vietnam. The people in this quasi-group of provinces have nurtured a tradition of being a strong centre of political power until the present day.

Also in the North, Thanh Hoa province had a special contribution to the history of Vietnam: this single province was itself a centre of power that lasted some 300 years, straddling the Le and Nguyen dynasties. The clans of Trinh and Nguyen, mentioned above, both originated from Thanh Hoa; albeit the clan of Nguyen went to the South and later founded the Nguyen dynasty.<sup>20</sup>

After the Second World War, with Vietnam divided into the North and the South by the 1954 Geneva Agreement, many communists shifted from the South to the North to prepare for eventual reunification. Following Vietnam's reunification in 1975, Party organisations were re-strengthened in the Centre and the South, and soon entrenched themselves there, forming local political support bases for the ruling CPV regime headquartered in the North. In a way, the history of Vietnam from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day have re-enforced the culture of three distinct geographical regions.

The CPV was founded in January 1930 through the merger of three then-existing communist parties in Vietnam. At that time, the general secretaries of all the three parties were almost all from the North<sup>21</sup> - Bac Ninh, Ha Noi, Hung Yen, Hai Phong, Nam Dinh, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh provinces. Since the 1930s, all CPV general secretaries have been from the North, except for Le Duan and Nguyen Van Linh who were politically considered as being from the South (see [Table 2](#) below).

**Table 2: General Secretaries of the CPV (1930 to present date)**

<b>Geographical Regions</b>	<b>Provinces</b>	<b>General Secretaries</b>	<b>Duration</b>
North	Ha Tinh	Tran Phu	1930 - 1931
North	Nghe An	Le Hong Phong	1931 - 1936
North	Ha Tinh	Ha Huy Tap	1936 - 1938
North	Bac Ninh	Nguyen Van Cu	1938 - 1940
North	Nam Dinh	Truong Chinh	1940 - 1956
North	Nghe An	Ho Chi Minh	1956 - 1960
<b>South</b>	Quang Tri	Le Duan	1960 - 1986
North	Nam Dinh	Truong Chinh	1986
<b>South</b>	Hung Yen	Nguyen Van Linh	1986 - 1991
North	Ha Noi	Do Muoi	1991 - 1997
North	Thanh Hoa	Le Kha Phieu	1997 - 2001
North	Bac Kan	Nong Duc Manh	2001 - 2011
North	Ha Noi	Nguyen Phu Trong	2011 – Present

*Source: Various public sources*

At the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Congress in 1951, the Party<sup>22</sup> established a personnel body to oversee the personnel and organisational matters of the Party and the government. However, the choice of members of the Central Committee, the Secretariat and the Politburo was based solely on the will and preference of the top leaders and members of the Politburo. At that time, the top leaders and individual members of the Politburo had a few cadres under their personal tutelage. Without going through any objective assessment of competence, knowledge, experience and morality, a protege could secure a strong endorsement for promotion. More often than not, leaders tended to take care of individuals who were from the same province as themselves.

The propensity for leaders to promote fellow-provincial or fellow-regional men into positions of influence has been a basic motivation for nurturing geographical groups.<sup>23</sup> Groups often create narratives to hail their own achievements and lay claim to leadership roles. They sometimes disguise political infightings as the practicing of democratic centralism. Inside each larger group, there may be smaller groups with links to particular provinces or provincial districts.

Personnel installation is a top-down process: the Central Commission of Personnel and Organisation assists the Central Committee and the Politburo to select cadres from the various regions and provinces, from central apparatus (such as ministries, central commissions of the Party, Fatherland Front, Communist Youth, Women’s Union). The selected cadres are sent to be trained at Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy (the Party’s organ) and National Administrative Academy (the state organ). After training, these cadres are assigned to posts at the Party and state organisations via personnel decisions and through Party congresses.



For instance, Directive No. 35 of 2019 issued by the CPV Politburo<sup>24</sup> aims to maximise the number of provincial party secretaries being from provinces other than the ones they are serving in. To date, about 46 percent of provinces have such party secretaries.<sup>25</sup> Quite a few of these party secretaries are from the political geographical groups of Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Ha Nam, Nam Dinh.

In addition, Directive No. 214 of 2020 issued by the CPV Politburo<sup>26</sup> contain a set of rules for personnel selection based on competence, experience, morality, ethnicity, gender, and health. Although this directive appears to be a step towards more objective criteria for selection of top leaders, it is unclear to what extent these criteria are adhered to in actual practice. More often than not, the unwritten rules of political geographical arrangements are used to temper, even to object to earlier choices made on the basis of such criteria.

## CONCLUSION

A key objective of CPV politics is to promote political solidarity and unity nationwide by having a leadership that is based on some form of equilibrium among the different geographical regions of Vietnam. The South and the North, which have traditionally been more dynamic in either generating wealth or functioning as political centres than the Centre, are more prominent in the top national leadership, and in key institutions such as the Central Committee and the Secretariat.

However, the CPV and the government have made a special effort to ensure that the Centre is represented as well. This was demonstrated when the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress reached a consensus to install Nguyen Xuan Phuc, who is from the Centre, to the position of prime minister in 2016. If he is re-elected at the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress, he is likely to assume another key role.<sup>27</sup> It is also possible that he may step down. In addition, representation of the Central provinces may be strengthened with one or two more individuals from this region being elevated to the Politburo (see [Table 3](#) below).

**Table 3 – First-time Candidates as Members of the Politburo of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress**

	<b>Geographical Regions</b>	<b>Provinces</b>	<b>Politburo (13<sup>th</sup> National Congress term's candidates)</b>
1	North	Phu Tho	Luong Cuong
2	North	Ninh Binh	Dinh Tien Dung
4	North	Ha Nam	Dao Ngoc Dung
5	North	Nghe An	Phan Dinh Trac
6	North	Nghe An	Nguyen Xuan Thang
7	North	Ha Tinh	Ms. Le Thi Nga
8	North	Ha Nam	Ms. Bui Thi Minh Hoai
9	North	Ha Tinh	Tran Cam Tu
10	North	Ha Tinh	Le Minh Hung
11	North	Tuyen Quang	Do Van Chien
12	Centre	Quang Ngai	Nguyen Hoa Binh
13	Centre	Thua Thien – Hue	Bui Thanh Son
14	South	Tay Ninh	Nguyen Van Nen
15	South	Hau Giang	Tran Thanh Man
16	South	An Giang	Ms. Vo Thi Anh Xuan
17	South	Bac Lieu	Le Minh Khai
18	South	Tien Giang	Nguyen Trong Nghia

*Source: Various sources*

Current indications are that the incoming general secretary is likely to be someone from the North. This will not come as a surprise as the Northern provinces that include Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Ha Tinh have traditionally been part of the CPV's definition of the geographical North as well as the political centre.

The line-up of the top leadership remains fluid at the moment. One must wait at least until the 15<sup>th</sup> plenum of the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress is held to learn how many members of the Politburo who are older than 65 will be retained at the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress. At the 15<sup>th</sup> plenum, there is a possibility that the general secretary and prime minister could come from the same geographical region of Vietnam. If this should come to pass, it would represent a break with convention.

<sup>1</sup> The 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress will be held from 25 January to 2 February 2021 in Hanoi; see Vietnam government news at [VGP News at Ban Chấp hành Trung ương triệu tập Đại hội XIII từ ngày 25/1/2021 | BÁO ĐIỆN TỬ CHÍNH PHỦ NƯỚC CHXHCN VIỆT NAM \(baochinhphu.vn\)](https://www.vgpnews.com.vn/ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-trieu-tap-dai-hoi-xiii-tu-ngay-25-1-2021)

<sup>2</sup> Holding a 15<sup>th</sup> plenum before a National Congress is not a record. At the CPV's 2<sup>nd</sup> National Congress in the 1950s, a 16<sup>th</sup> plenum was held.

<sup>3</sup> Prior to 1991, the post of chairperson of the national assembly was not as important as the other three posts.

<sup>4</sup> The CPV's definition of the geographical regions is different from physical geographical regions of Vietnam. Based on the Party's definition, the North consists of all the Northern provinces down to Ha Tinh province; the Centre stretches from Quang Binh province southwards to Phu Yen province (including all the Central Highland provinces); and the rest of the provinces comprises the South.

<sup>5</sup> Lye Liang Fook and Ha Hoang Hop, *Vietnam's 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress: Document Preparation and Personnel Lineup*, Perspective No. 84, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 6 August 2020.

[https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2020\\_84.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ISEAS_Perspective_2020_84.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> In addition, there are indications that existing Politburo member Vuong Dinh Hue will become chairperson of the national assembly. Hue was previously minister of finance and head of the CPV Central Economic Commission. He has a doctoral degree in economics and was a professor at the Hanoi University of Finance and Accountancy in the 1990s.

<sup>7</sup> The CPV wanted to avoid the personality cult of Joseph Stalin and the over-concentration of power by Mao Zedong. It wanted to avoid the power concentration of Mikhail Gorbachev as well, especially in his later years as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

<sup>8</sup> The Platform of the Nation Building in the Transition Period to the Socialism – the 7<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPV, 1991. Source: <https://tulieuvankien.dangcongsan.vn/ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang/dai-hoi-dang/lan-thu-vii/cuong-linh-xay-dung-dat-nuoc-trong-thoi-ky-qua-do-len-chu-nghia-xa-hoi-1558>.

<sup>9</sup> The Communist Party of Indochina, the Communist Party of Annam, and the Communist League of Indochina joined together to form a united communist party called the *Communist Party of Vietnam (Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam)* in Hong Kong on 3-7 February 1930.

<sup>10</sup> Among all the general secretaries, only Nguyen Van Linh is politically considered as originating from the South. But interestingly, he was born in the North, but spent his political life in the South from age 15.

<sup>11</sup> Since 1995, the South has been contributing more than 60% of Vietnam's total state budget.

<sup>12</sup> The five members of the Politburo are Dinh The Huynh (inactive due to illness), Dinh La Thang (dismissed and prosecuted), Tran Dai Quang (deceased), Ngo Xuan Lich (Defence Minister) and Pham Binh Minh (Deputy Prime Minister cum Foreign Minister). Only Pham Binh Minh will be a candidate for the Politburo of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress since Ngo Xuan Lich will step down and retire due to his age. We can expect new candidates to be selected from this group to the Politburo and the Secretariat of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress.

<sup>13</sup> They are members of the Politburo Vuong Dinh Hue (from Nghe An), member of the Secretariat Phan Dinh Trac and Nguyen Xuan Thang (both from Nghe An), and member of the Secretariat Tran Cam Tu (from Ha Tinh).

<sup>14</sup> They are Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc (member of the Politburo, from Quang Nam province), and Chief Justice Nguyen Hoa Binh (member of the Secretariat, from Quang Ngai province).

<sup>15</sup> The six members of the Politburo are: Nguyen Phu Trong (from Hanoi), Tran Quoc Vuong (from Thai Binh province), To Lam (from Hung Yen province), Pham Minh Chinh (from Thanh Hoa province), Hoang Trung Hai (from Thai Binh province) and Nguyen Van Binh (from Phu Tho province); and the member of the Secretariat is Luong Cuong (from Phu Tho province).

<sup>16</sup> Vietnam Party Central Committee meets to identify successors, *Vietnam Express*, 11 May 2020, at <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-party-central-committee-meets-to-identify-successors-4097508.html>.

<sup>17</sup> The list of members of the Central Committee of the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress, <https://tulieuvankien.dangcongsan.vn/ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang/ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang/khoa-xii>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ben Kiernan, *Việt Nam: A History from Earliest Time to the Present* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> General Secretary Le Kha Phieu (1997-2001) was from Thanh Hoa. Vietnam's longest serving prime minister Pham Van Dong (1955-1987) was born in Quang Ngai province, but his home village was in Thanh Hoa province.

<sup>21</sup> The CPV definition of political geography is used in this piece.

<sup>22</sup> The CPV presented itself as the Vietnam Workers' Party until 1976.

<sup>23</sup> As an example, Ho Duc Viet, during his five years as Head of the CPV Central Commission on Personnel and Organisation, recruited many cadres from Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces to many party organisations and state apparatus. A dozen or two are now members of the Central Committee; and a few are members of the Politburo and Secretariat.

<sup>24</sup> Decision No. 35 of the Politburo on convening all level party congresses to prepare for the 13<sup>th</sup> national congress, <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/bo-may-hanh-chinh/Chi-thi-35-CT-TW-2019-dai-hoi-dang-bo-cac-cap-tien-toi-Dai-hoi-dai-bieu-toan-quoc-lan-thu-XIII-417004.aspx>.

<sup>25</sup> 22 of the provincial party secretaries are not locals, see <https://vietnamnet.vn/vn/thoi-su/dai-hoi-dang/22-bi-thu-tinh-uy-khong-la-nguoi-dia-phuong-682422.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Decision No. 214 of 2 January 2020 on the criteria for selection of cadres (Quy định số 214-QĐ/TW, ngày 02/01/2020 của Bộ Chính trị về khung tiêu chuẩn chức danh, tiêu chí đánh giá cán bộ thuộc diện Ban Chấp hành Trung ương, Bộ Chính trị, Ban Bí thư quản lý), 19 November 2020, <https://tulieuvankien.dangcongsan.vn/he-thong-van-ban/van-ban-cua-dang/quy-dinh-so-214-qdtw-ngay-02012020-cua-bo-chinh-tri-ve-khung-tieu-chuan-chuc-danh-tieu-chi-danh-gia-can-bo-thuoc-dien-ban-6021>.

<sup>27</sup> There are indications that Nguyen Xuan Phuc could be president.

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