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Background Briefing:

Vietnam's 12th Party Congress: What to Expect, Why Is It Important?

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We are drafting a short report on Vietnam's Party Congress to be held in January and we would very much appreciate if you could provide us with some background on what we can expect at the coming 12th National Party Congress and what the congress means for the country and its people.

REPLY: Vietnam will hold the 12th National Congress of the Vietnam Communist Party from 20-28 January. The National Congress convenes every five years and is the highest party executive authority. The 12th Congress is especially significant as Vietnam takes further steps to integrate itself with the global economy through the Trans Pacific Partnership and through participating in multinational institutions. The 12th Congress will be important for two reasons. First, it will elect a new Central Committee. The Central Committee in turn will elect the Politburo, Secretariat, Inspection Committee, Secretary General and endorse candidates for the office of state president, prime minister and chair of the National Assembly. These candidates will stand for election in May.

Central Committee members, who met recently at the 13th plenum, individually voted for candidates for the four top party-state positions. Leadership selection has been contentious this year. Ordinarily party rules require that persons who have served two terms in office and/or reached 65 years of age should retire. However a special exemption can be made. For example, the 11th National Congress elected Nguyen Phu Trong as party Secretary General even though he was over 65 years of age. It is rumoured that Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung wants to be the next party leader and he could receive an exemption from the retirement age. But Dung's case is unprecedented. No top leader who retires from high office has sought an exemption to serve in another high office. Reportedly this has produced a backlash against Dung by his rivals, President Truong Tan Sang and Secretary General Trong.

The Vietnam Communist Party has been more transparent than previously in keeping the general public informed about the mechanics of leadership selection. So far, however, the names of successful candidates for election to the Central Committee and higher office have been kept confidential.

Second, the 12th National Congress will be important to the ordinary people of Vietnam in particular because it will adopt two major policy documents, the Political

Report and the Socio-Economic Plan for 2016-2020. Drafts of these documents were released in September for public discussion and comment.

The draft Political Report gives priority to, among other matters, education and training, developing science and technology, tackling corruption, enhancing the rule of law, national unity, socialist democracy, and building “a clean and strong party.”

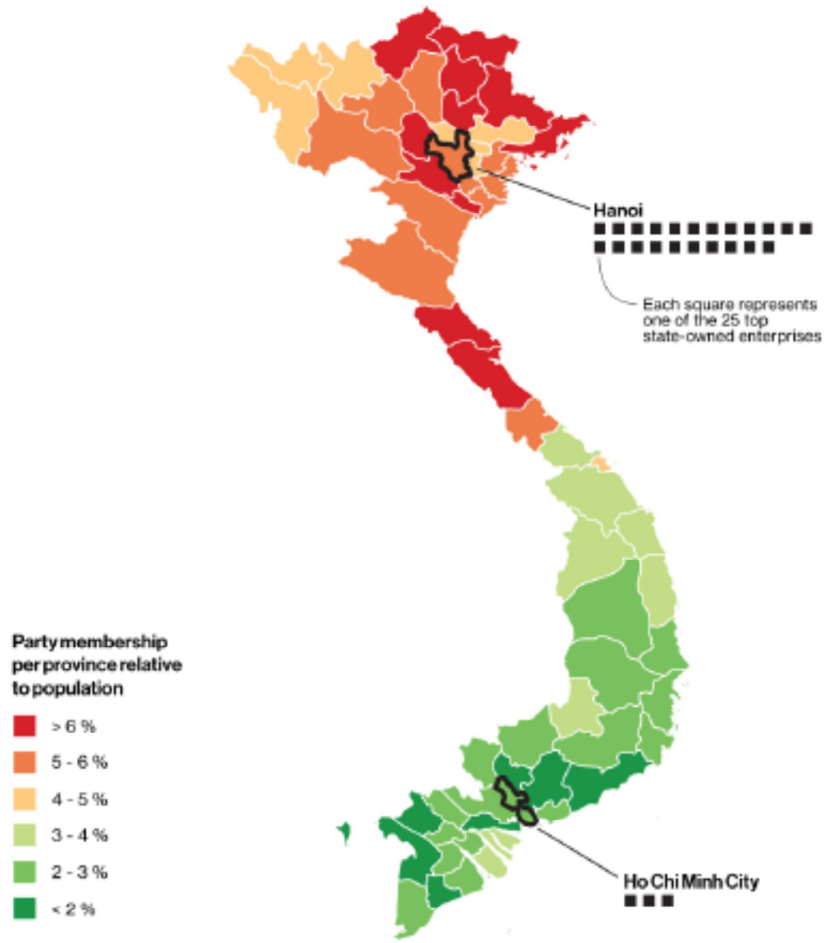
The Socio-Economic Plan stresses the importance of maintaining macro-economic stability, controlling public debt and developing Vietnam into a modern and industrialised country by 2020. It sets the target of an average GDP growth rate of between 6.5 and 7 per cent over the next five years. By 2020 GDP per capita is expected to reach U.S. \$3,670-\$3,750 or placing Vietnam at the border line between low and medium income country.

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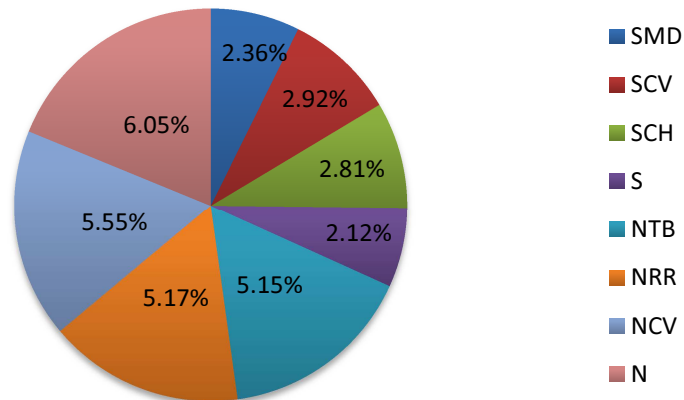
Membership in Vietnam's Communist Party is heavily skewed to the north

Almost 70% of Communist party members live in the north, though those provinces are home to less than half of the country's 87 million population. Northern provinces also have higher percentages of party membership relative to their population. The nation's resources are also heavily leveraged in the north -- 22 of the 25 largest state-owned companies are based in the capital city of Hanoi.



Sources: Carole Thayer's compilation of 2013 provincial data on party membership, Vietnam government website

Party Membership by Region



- SMD South Mekong Delta provinces
- SCV South Central Vietnam provinces
- SCH South Central Highlands provinces
- South (southern provinces)
- NTB North Tay Bac (North East) provinces
- NRR North Red River Delta provinces
- NCH North Central Highlands provinces
- North (northern provinces)

VCP Membership (in millions)

