

Vietnam's Communist Party selects its leaders for the next five years

February 3, 2021



The Communist Party of Vietnam has completed its National Congress and selected new leadership for a five-year term. This marks the beginning of Vietnam's broader governance transition, with upcoming milestones revolving around the National Assembly: expected confirmation of a new slate of Ministers in March, a national election in May, the sitting of a new National Assembly in July.

The new leadership reflect the trends of the last five-year term: Party primacy and the strong influence of General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng over the country's levers of power. The expected new Prime Minister, Phạm Minh Chính, complicates this picture given his limited government experience, but promotions for key Ministers suggest policy consistency.

Vriens & Partners expects continuity rather than change to underpin Vietnam's strategic and policy trajectories, but it will take until the new National Assembly and Government are in place to fully assess the impact of this new Party leadership.

General Secretary Trọng was re-elected to a third term, making him the longest-serving General Secretary since Le Duan in the 1990s. Having outmanoeuvred and ousted the powerful former Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng at the 2016 Congress, Trọng's vision continues to define the current Party. His signature anti-corruption campaign, the so-called "blazing furnace", has claimed a wide range of ambitious politicians, including a number of rivals and up-and-comers.

The Prime Minister position, to which Phạm Minh Chính is expected to be elevated, is nonetheless a major nod towards change. Unlike every Prime Minister before him, Chính has never served as a Minister or Deputy Prime Minister and he comes from the Party's Organization Commission. This, along with his long career at the Ministry of Public Security, will generate some justified uncertainty.

However, Chính gained a reputation for administrative reform as a Party Secretary in the economic powerhouse Quang Ninh province in the early 2010s. While his current economic vision is not known, his skill sets and track record as a decisive leader may counterbalance his lack of policy credentials.

Current Prime Minister Phúc is expected to be named President, moving Vietnam back to its traditional 'top four' structure, and ending Trọng's two and half years as dual-hatted head of Party and head of State. While a step down in mandate, the Presidency allows Phúc to stay in the top four and potentially opens a door for him to define to a public-facing, economic diplomacy role.

The makeup of the new Politburo also reflects political continuity. Eight members were re-elected, seven come from the Party's Secretariat (seen as a Politburo-in-waiting), and just three individuals were elevated from the outside. It is also an older group, with just five eligible for re-election in 2026 without an age waiver, highlighting questions around the Party's future leadership.

The promotion of Minister of Finance Đinh Tiến Dũng and Minister of Industry and Trade Trần Tuấn Anh to the Politburo, as well as Minister of Planning and Investment Nguyễn Chí Dũng's age waiver to stay on as a member of the Central Committee, are important indicators of policy continuity. Dũng and Tuấn Anh will likely leave their Ministries (potentially for Deputy Prime Minister or Economic Commission roles) but their influence over the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Industry and Trade, respectively, will endure.

Looking forward, uncertainty will persist over whether Trọng will retire early. In his acceptance speech, he noted his ill health and implied he would have preferred to retire. **Current Prime Minister Phúc**

and Hanoi Party Secretary Vương Đình Huệ are the leading candidates to replace him should he step down, though others in the Politburo will also see opportunities. The potential of a mid-term succession is likely to drive caution within the new leadership, with no one wanting to jeopardize promotion chances—or find themselves in that blazing furnace of anti-corruption.

The longer-term future of that anti-corruption campaign also faces questions marks. While Trọng's dedication has not wavered since 2016, whether he has the political strength or will to continue with the same intensity as his retirement approaches is not clear. No other Politburo member has taken up anti-corruption issues with such vigour, which makes its long-term prioritization post-Trọng's retirement even more uncertain.

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