



## Cuba and the New Post Revolution/Post Castro Leader

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In a speech in 2011, President Raul Castro as part of his political reforms agenda proposed that political positions should be limited to two, five year, terms. He felt it would reinvigorate the Communist Party of Cuba by bring younger people into a party. President Castro as a result of the reforms is going to retire from the Presidency of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers in April 2018. Nonetheless, the Communist Party of Cuba, the only legal party of the island nation, would be headed by President Castro till 2021.

The elections are a talking point not just in Cuba but across the world. It would be the first time after the revolution that Cuba is going to be led by a leader who does not belong to the Castro family. The process would begin with the elections to elect the new 614 member National Assembly of People's Power to be held on 11 March 2018. The new National Assembly, will function from the renovated Capitol building, will select the new Council of Ministers and the President

### **The Election Process**

The country's election process is governed by 'Law No. 72 of 1992, (29 October); the 2007 Electoral Law and Decree Law No. 248, on the voter registry. The Electoral Law regulates the procedures for electing the delegates to the municipal and provincial assemblies, and the legislators to the National Assembly of People's Power.

Law no. 72 Article 2 states, "*The electoral processes established by this Law are:*

*general elections, in which the Deputies are elected to the National Assembly of People's Power, its President, Vice President and Secretary, to the President, First Vice President, Vice Presidents, Secretary and the other members of the Council of State, to the Delegates of the Assemblies Provincial and Municipal People's Power and their Presidents and Vice-Presidents;*

*Partial elections, in which the Delegates are elected to the Municipal Assemblies of People's Power and their Presidents and Vice-Presidents.”*

Deputies to the National Assembly and Delegates to the Provincial Assemblies of People's Power are to be elected for a term of five years, whereas the delegates to the Municipal Assemblies are to be elected for a term of two and a half years.

Article 12 of the law states, delegates to the 166 Municipal Assemblies of People's Power would be elected at the rate of one candidate for each electoral district of the municipality. Article 13 states, The Delegates to the 15 Provincial Assemblies<sup>2</sup> of the Popular Power are elected by the direct vote of the electors of the Municipality for which they have been nominated. The number of Delegates to the Provincial Assemblies must be seventy-five (75) minimum. Article 14 states, The National Assembly of People's Power shall be composed of Deputies elected by direct vote of the voters of the Municipality.<sup>3</sup>

Map 1: Provinces in Cuba.



Source: Embassy of Cuba in Venezuela

The candidates for the Municipal Assemblies of People's Power are elected through a direct election process. Cubans met in common spaces, parks and buildings for neighbourhood assemblies to choose and nominate the candidates in municipal elections. Sheets of paper with biographies and photos of the candidates are then pasted at strategically placed walls and windows in each neighbourhood for residents to read. This is the maximum campaigning allowed by the government. Based on this information, people elect their representatives. The candidates for the Provincial and National Assembly's are nominated by the Municipal Assemblies based on the slate/list of nominations provided by mass organisations or commissions elected by workers, farmers, students groups, and women's groups.

The final candidate list is compiled by the National Candidature Commission, which is composed of mass and social organizations from all sectors of society is presided over by the

Cuban Workers' Federation and includes the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution, Federation of Cuban Women, Federation of University Students, Federation of Secondary School Students, and the National Association of Small Farmers.

The final candidates are then put to a national vote, where they must gather the maximum votes to become part of the National Assembly to serve 5-year terms. To be declared elected, each candidate must obtain more than 50 percent of the valid votes cast in the constituency in which he or she is running. If this is not attained, the seat in question remains vacant unless the Council of State decides to hold another election.

The right to vote in Cuba is granted to all citizens and permanent residents of Cuba who have reached 16 years of age, and who are not currently under legal probation or determined mentally unfit to vote. The vote is free, equal and secret, and each voter is granted one vote as guaranteed in the constitution. The vote is voluntary and nobody can be legally sanctioned for not participating.

After the National Assembly has been elected, the members of the State Council or the Cabinet are elected by the deputies of the National Assembly. The members of the Council include the President, First Vice President, other Vice Presidents, secretaries and other members. The Candidate Commission consults with the deputies of the National Assembly and a slate/list of candidates is presented to the Assembly. The slate/list is voted through a show of hand by the members. There after there is a secret direct ballot vote, where deputies elect members of the Council of State. A candidate must receive more than 50 percent votes to be elected.<sup>4</sup>

The process has been hailed by its proponents as one that allows the people to propose, nominate and elect their representatives without any outside influence. Campaign is limited and same for all candidates thus removing ideological and economic interests from the elections process. All citizens above the age of 16 are automatically eligible to vote except if they have committed a felony and/or are mentally unsound. Critics of the process state that the Communist Party of Cuba as the only legal party controls the selection processes of the candidates. Dissident candidates are marginalised and not nominated as the process is dominated by trade unions, other workers groups, teachers and students groups which are in some measure affiliated to the Communist Party. The best a dissident candidate can hope is to win the election for the Municipal Assembly but it is unlikely that they will be nominated further.

### **The Candidate for President**

As President Castro outlined his plans to leave office at the end of the term, it has become clear that the current First Vice President, Mr. Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, is likely to succeed to the leadership position. He has spent more than 20 years with the party and has risen through the ranks after servicing in provincial positions. (He was elected First Secretary of the Provincial Party Committee of Villa Clara Province in 1994. He has also been elected to the same position in the province of Holguin in 2003.) He was elected to be a member of the Politburo, the highest leadership of the Communist Party in 2003, and he served as Minister of Higher Education (2009 to 2012); he was promoted to the post of Vice President of the Council of Ministers in 2012. A year

later, in 2013, he was elected as First Vice President of the Council of State, a significant generational shift. He was the first Cuban born after the 1959 revolution to ascend to the position.<sup>5</sup>

Born a year after the revolution, he has studied electronic engineering. Mr. Diaz-Canel has pressed for modernisation of the state run media outlets and better internet access for the people. If elected by the National Assembly, Mr. Diaz-Canel will be the first civilian president of the country since the revolution and also the first President born post the revolution. These two factors may bring him support from the younger generations born decades after the revolution and in a globalised digital world. One can say with some certainty that his succession is likely with a view to make the party and its ideology appeal to the younger generations if both want to survive in Cuba. It is unlikely that he will make any changes to the Cuban reform process as started by President Castro. The reform process was started with the aim to ensure the relevance of the 'revolution' and its ideas with the younger generation of Cubans. They are with a view to incorporate new ideas of effective governance. Mr. Diaz-Canel has been supportive of these initiatives. As pointed before he has supported more internet access. However, as a possible future President, he has not been vocal about his policies as yet and has held the party line on important issues such as relations with the United States in foreign policy and economic and political reforms within Cuba.

If Mr. Diaz-Canel is elected President, it would mark a transition of power to the next generation of Cuban leadership. The new President would not be a military man., and in a country where the past two Presidents were 'soldiers of the revolution', his interactions with the military and the other major institutions would need to be watched. As the first 'civilian' President, how he balances the various departments of the government, build on the domestic reform process and build Cuba's international relations, would be closely followed by all.

As the first post revolution leader Mr. Diaz-Canel, would have both the opportunity and the task to balance the aspirations of the young with the ideas of the revolution fought by the generations before.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Political Database of the Americas, 2018 Cuba: Electoral Law of 1992," <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Electoral/Cuba/cuba.html>, Accessed on 05 March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> The Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth), the Cuban archipelago's second-largest island, is a special municipality., which is directly under the central government.

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<sup>3</sup> Political Database of the Americas, 2018 Cuba: Electoral Law of 1992,”  
<http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Electoral/Cuba/cuba.html>, Accessed on 05 March 2018.

<sup>4</sup> ---, “How Are Cuba's Leaders Chosen?,” <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/How-Are-Cubas-Leaders-Chosen-20180303-0011.html>, Yisel Martínez and Danae González Del Toro, “How do elections work in Cuba?,” <http://en.granma.cu/cuba/2018-02-20/how-do-elections-work-in-cuba>, Accessed on 05 March 2017

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Trotta, “After Castro's death, attention turns to Cuba's heir apparent,”  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-castro-diaz-canel/after-castros-death-attention-turns-to-cubas-heir-apparent-idUSKBN13P0FC>, Accessed on 06 March 2018.