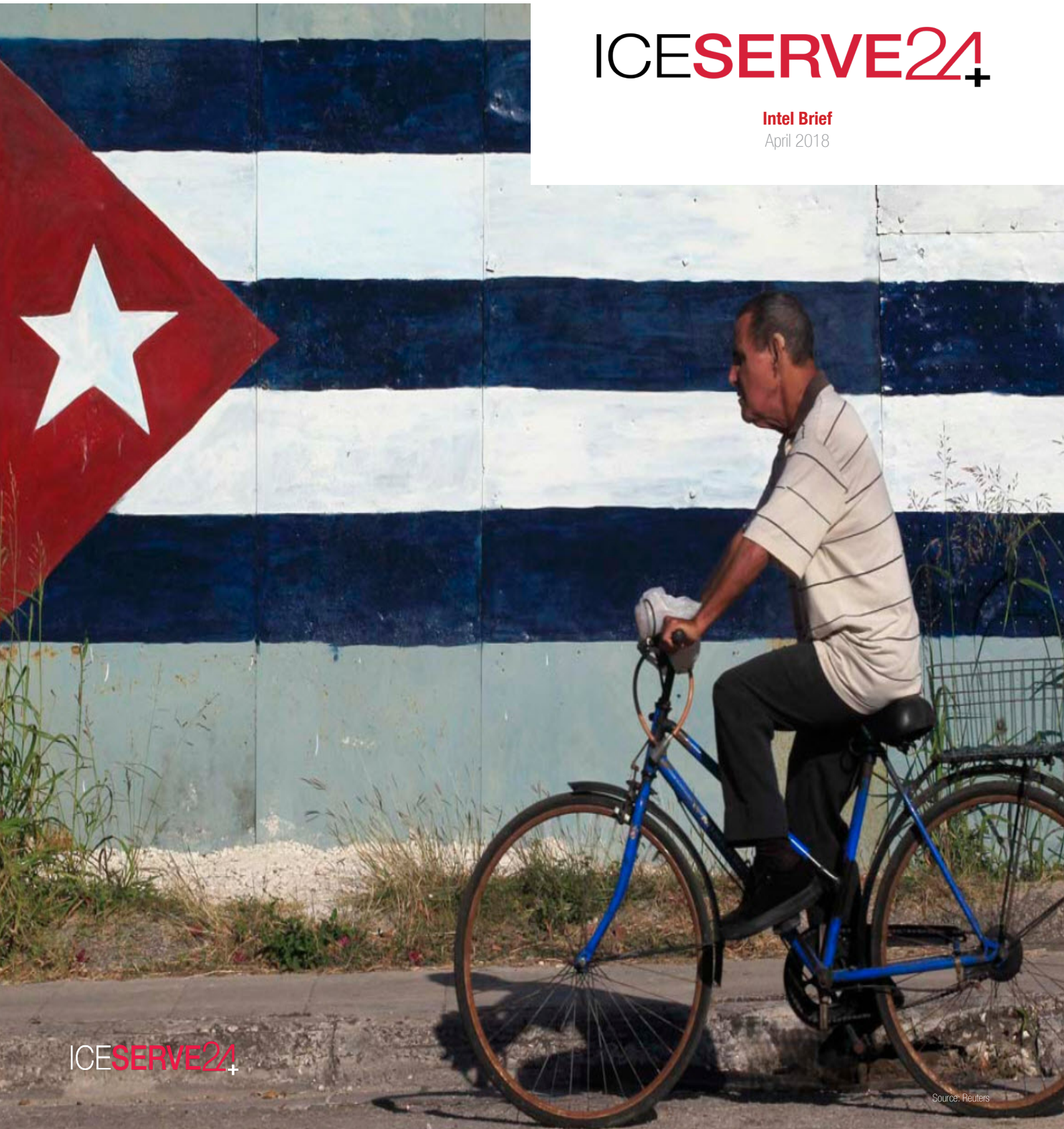


CUBA: A CHANGE OF SEASONS

ICESERVE24+

Intel Brief
April 2018



ICESERVE24+

Source: Reuters

Cuba's 59 years of Castro family reign will reportedly come to an end this week. According to the country's state media, the National Assembly will meet on April 18 to begin the process of succession, which according to the constitution the incumbent President Raul Castro, will hand over the presidency to the vice president. The 57-year-old Miguel Díaz-Canel will thus, be the next president of Cuba. The society is faced with several challenges, as most of the population is illiterate in current technological trends with only a very small percentage currently connected to the Internet, whereas the rising Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has not coincided with rises in wages.

Vice President since 2013, Díaz-Canel has been a member of the Politburo since 2003, and has served as minister of higher education from 2009 to 2012, demonstrating that he remains a strong Marxist-Leninist ideologue. Díaz-Canel is very popular in the country, despite the general feeling of frustration for the slow pace of market reforms and the deteriorating infrastructure. His surprise visits in businesses and social events seem to have paid off, at least for the time being. Although he had been reported as a moderate politician, in the past years he has been seen as a conservative communist, emphasising the continuation of the single-party political system and the state-controlled and planned economy. The future president has also been caught accusing foreign governments and independent media for supporting "subversive activity" against Cuba. Generally, his colleagues and friends that spoke to international media describe him as a down-to-earth and accessible politician. Díaz-Canel reportedly also assisted in keeping Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) safe spaces open in Cuba, despite opposite policies by the government in the 1960s and 1970s.

Raul Castro will reportedly remain head of the Communist Party to keep oversight of Díaz-Canel during his first years in power. This signifies that for the time being, no major changes should be expected in the country's governing policies. Cuba under Castro had attempted to keep diplomatic channels with the United States (U.S.) open and under Barack Obama some ties were established, mostly in tourism-related issues. On the contrary, current U.S. President Donald Trump backrolled a number of deals and agreements. Díaz-Canel moves along the same lines, having told the U.S.-based *NBC News* during municipal elections in November 2017, "we continue to be open to relations" with the U.S.

Díaz-Canel faces a number of domestic challenges, mostly the economic hardships and the low salaries, with people demanding better living standards. Lacking the revolutionary and military style of his predecessors and fathers of the post-1950s Cuba, Díaz-Canel will be much more harshly criticised, especially if he fails to deliver on the government's promises for reforms and economic improvement. Díaz-Canel will also have to balance his own vision with the party's line and Castro's wishes, if he wishes to carry on his presidency unchallenged.



The future president Díaz-Canel (left), next to incumbent President Raul Castro (right)

Contact ICESERVE24's Europe and the Americas Desk for additional analysis, briefs or detailed information