Cuba without the Castros

What is the issue?

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- ‘Raul Castro’ recently initiated a power transition in Cuba on his own volition by anointing ‘Miguel Díaz-Canel’ as his successor and getting him elected.
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- This is very significant as it marks a calculated break from the Castors, who’ve been at the helm for about 6 decades now.
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Who have ruled Cuba thus far?

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- The 1959 revolution saw Fidel Castro led communist rebels take over the Cuban administration from the pro-U.S. Batista regime.
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- Since then, Fidel held on to the helm for 49 years till 2008, when he retired due to health reasons after anointing his brother Raul Castro as his successor.
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- Notably, Cuba is a single party state and elections for political positions are held from within its party members.
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- Raul Castro recently completed his 2nd five year term as President and had anointed ‘Miguel Díaz-Canel’ as his successor.
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- Notably, Raul made it clear as early as 2011 that he would relinquish power after the 2nd term and ensure a smooth transition.
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- He also started grooming his successor early into his 2nd term and has now got him elected to the top within the National Assembly.
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- Hence, Mr.Miguel, an engineer who rose through the ranks of the Communist Party has now assumed charge, in what is seen as a historic

power transition.
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What are the challenges?

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- **Transition -** For any state born in revolution, 1st transfer of power to a new generation is always politically risky.
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- Mr.Miguel now faces the tough task of balancing the interests of the ideologically rooted older revolutionary comrades who still dominate the Communist Party.
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- But Raul will continue till 2021 as the First Secretary of the Communist party - the main body that formulates major national policies.
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- Hence, while the transition at the helm is indeed significant, it is not expected to unleash any instability as Raul would continue to wield considerable power.
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- **Economy -** Cuban economy presents its own set of challenges, and abolition of the troublesome “Duel currency system” is the immediate challenge.
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- Also, resorting to IMF or WB for assistance is not an option for Cuba as its revolution was rooted in antipathy against these institutions.
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- Raul had earlier began a slow and tricky market reforms by easing restrictions on private enterprise, and now this will have to be furthered cautiously.
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- If markets are liberalised too fast, it would alienate the ‘Old Guard’ and if too slow, growth will take a beating and regime critics will become more vocal.
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- **Political Freedom** - A growing cohort of critics against the regime is another major challenge to deal with in the internet era.
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- Notably, Mr.Miguel supported a recent counter offensive launched by hardliner communists, vilifying critical bloggers – which has worried liberals.
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- Censorship is another stress point that Raul had sought to delicately address during his rule by a policy of “slow continued incremental liberalisation”.
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- But Raul had enjoyed undisputed influence over the Communist Party to make these bold moves, which his successor might find hard to emulate.
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- **US relations –** The Obama regime build a positive relation with Cuba and even established diplomatic ties for the 1st time, but Trump has reversed all.
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- Additionally, the Trump administration has largely outsourced Cuba policy to the conservative anti-Castro Cuban-Americans in the Congress.
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- Trump has also downsized the U.S. embassy in Cuba as strange incidence of unexplained sickness was reported by diplomats.
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How is the public reception?

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- A considerable chunk of the younger masses look optimistic with a new leadership at the helm and excited about the power transition.
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- But as Castros had held sway for as long as most Cubans could remember, there is anxiety on whether newer leadership wound mean instability.
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- Nevertheless, Mr.Miguel represents a younger and aspiring generation that is looking forward to strong economic progress and political freedom.
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- He could ensure that by co-opting all stakeholders, political stability get entrenched despite the reforms.
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Source: The Hindu, The Wire

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