

World Watch Research

Cuba:

# Background Information

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## Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

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## Map of country



Cuba: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
11,175,000	6,843,000	61.2

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

## Recent history

A new Constitution was approved in April 2019, affirming the Communist Party’s leading role in Cuban society, and making Socialism, as the guiding philosophy, irreversible. Although the Constitution imposes term limits for the presidency (two consecutive five-year terms), it does not recognize the separation of powers and does little to broaden civil and political rights. However, it does include several major changes to Cuba’s traditional economic and political modus operandi - particularly involving property rights and foreign investment - despite sticking to Socialist economic management as before.

One important change in the Constitution was the re-introduction of the office of President of the Republic, which had been discarded in 1976. In October 2019, Miguel Díaz-Canel was officially [elected](#) to the presidency by the National Assembly (ONU Cuba News, 11 October 2019), having already assumed that position when Raúl Castro handed over power to him in April 2018, thus [ending](#) six decades of rule by the Castro family (Latin American Post, 6 May 2019). In April 2023, he was [re-elected](#) as President for a new 5-year term (CubaMinRex, 19 April 2023). As president, he directs the country’s politics, foreign relations, and the armed forces.

Also, in October 2019, the position of prime minister was re-introduced for the first time in 43 years. In December 2019, the president nominated Manuel Marrero Cruz as [prime minister](#), a choice which was ratified by the National Assembly (BBC News, 22 December 2020) and then [again](#) in April 2023 (El País, 19 April 2023). The prime minister takes charge of the Council of Ministers and manages the day-to-day operations of the Cuban government. Additionally, in April 2021, Raul Castro resigned from the position of Cuban Communist Party Secretary. Party leadership was [handed over](#) to Miguel Díaz-Canel

who has stated that he will continue to consult with Raul Castro concerning any strategic planning for the future of the nation (Reuters, 19 April 2021).

The [fluctuations](#) in the relationship with the USA in recent years have also been significant (Council on foreign relations, 24 April 2024). After the attempts by former US-President Obama to restore diplomatic relations with Cuba, former US-President Donald Trump [imposed](#) new restrictive policies (US Department of State, 23 September 2020) and maintained commercial, economic and financial embargos (see below: Political and legal landscape). The current US president, Joe Biden, [tightened](#) sanctions against Cuba in July 2021, after the crackdown by Cuban officials against demonstrators in anti-government protests that erupted in the country in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the acute shortages of food, medicine and fuel, and widespread violations of human rights (Los Angeles Times, 18 October 2021). However, in May 2022, the Biden administration [reversed](#) some of the previous measures and re-engaged on some issues, notably migration (Wola, 16 December 2022).

In [September 2022](#), an epidemic of dengue fever was confirmed which, together with the ravages of Hurricane Ian, worsened the social and humanitarian crisis that was already plaguing the country (Observatorio Cubano de Conflictos, 3 October 2022). Additionally, another important fact with big consequences for the social life of Cuban people, it was the [fire](#) of fuel tanks in the city of Matanzas in August 2022 that lasted approximately 5 days and prolongedly affected the electricity supply on the island (CNN, 09 August 2022). Some experts [point out](#) that this event is the "largest industrial accident in the history of the country" (El País, August 9, 2022).

In 2024, Cuba has been affected by [floods](#) in different provinces, a situation that caused considerable material damage, exacerbating the shortages of medicines, food and electricity. (Reliefweb, 23 March 2024). Faced with this situation, Cáritas Cuba [called](#) for solidarity (Vatican News, 13 June 2023). Additionally, the fuel shortage crisis caused the suspension of the Workers' Day parade on 1 May 2023 in the Plaza de la Revolución. In 2020 and 2021 the parade had been canceled due to COVID-19, however, this is the first time since the revolution that it had been canceled for [economic reasons](#) (BBC News, 30 April 2023). In 2024, authorities decided to allow celebrations in each municipality to [avoid transportation](#) due to lack of fuel (France 24, 01 May 2024).

On 20 June 2023, Pope Francis [received](#) the President of the Republic of Cuba, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez in the Vatican. Among the topics discussed were the importance of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Cuba, the situation in the country and the contribution that the Church offers, especially in the areas of charity (Vatican News, 20 June 2023). Before that visit, the president had received [representatives](#) of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba at the Palace of the Revolution for discussing various issues, including the work of the Catholic Church, the socio-economic situation of the country and the strengthening of values in society (Presidencia Cuba, 26 April 2023).

It is worth mentioning that the Cuban government was [re-elected](#) for the sixth time as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, for the period 2024-2026 (Cubaminrex, 10 October 2023). In principle, membership of the Council implies the responsibility of each government to defend high standards of human rights, a condition that Cuba does not meet, which is why this appointment has been openly questioned by various sectors.

Many church leaders have given protesters their support by speaking out against the irregularities of the regime. As explained below in the section Religious landscape, this has also made them a target for retaliation by the regime.

## Political and legal landscape

Despite the constitutional reforms and the modifications in the power structure, the single party model has not been changed. On the contrary, under the guise of introducing elements of democracy, the Socialist/Communist grip on society has remained firmly in place. In this context, the government has passed a series of laws to give a certain appearance of legitimacy to its actions. Among the most recent are the following:

- The New Penal Code (2022) entered into force on 1 December 2022. This replaces the penal code enacted in 1987 and is much more restrictive. According to Amnesty International (AI, 2 December 2022) [five "alarming aspects"](#) of this new legislation are:
  1. Many provisions of the criminal code that have been used to silence and imprison activists for decades remain.
  2. The new Penal Code penalizes anyone who “endangers the constitutional order and the normal functioning” of the government.
  3. It criminalizes receipt of funding, further stifling independent journalists and activists.
  4. It severely limits freedom of expression online.
  5. The new penal code retains the death penalty for 23 different crimes.
- The Family Code. The [text](#) was submitted for popular consultation (Official Gazette, 12 January 2022), which was completed on 30 April 2022. [Version 25](#), which includes the modifications derived from the popular consultation (Parlamento Cubano, July 2022), was discussed in parliament in July and subsequently submitted to a referendum on 25 September 2022. The most significant [changes](#) concerned the areas of marriage, filiation and surrogacy, among others (Reuter, 14 November 2022). See further details below in: *Religious landscape*. The referendum approved the proposed changes (with around 66% of the votes). However, in the months prior to the referendum, the government launched an [intensive campaign](#) encouraging support for the changes while at the same time [criticizing](#) those who tried to campaign against the approval of the reform (Swissinfo, 20 September 2022).
- The [Law of Expropriation for Reasons of Public Utility or Social Interest](#) (2023) gives the authorities the right to take control of any real estate or land when required for securing internal order or for national defense and security. In this context, church buildings or property could be confiscated for arbitrary reasons (Gaceta Oficial, 29 May 2023)
- Law N° 162, the [Social Communication Law](#) (2023), which serves to prevent any content being shared in physical or digital public spaces that might subvert the constitutional order, destabilize the socialist State of Law and social justice or encourage hostility towards the nation. The law includes penalties for defaming, slandering or insulting persons, organs, agencies and entities of the State, and any national political and social organizations (Presidencia, 25 May 2023).
- The [Military Criminal Code](#) (2023) sets out that anyone receiving an order from the armed forces and expressly refuses to comply with it, or anyone attempting to evade military service, may be punished with a prison sentence (Gaceta Oficial, 11 August 2023).

## Signs of citizen dissatisfaction

In general, the Cuban government uses repressive measures to intimidate dissidents and all forms of opposition. Any sign of protest is classified by the government as 'unconstitutional' and is regarded as aiming for regime change via support given by various branches of the US government. Despite this, opposition in the Cuban population is growing due to the government's policies that have caused the collapse of the health system, uncontrolled inflation, food and energy insecurity, and further problems.

This opposition came to a head in July 2021, when citizens (especially young adults) took to the streets in a series of peaceful protests. These were the biggest anti-government demonstrations in decades. During the series of protests in 2021, the state authorities [arbitrarily detained](#) 1,397 protestors, including 15 minors (Radio Television Martí, 9 February 2022). Demonstrators and relatives of protesters and political detainees were [harassed](#) due to their part in publicizing the human rights violations being perpetrated by the authorities (ICHR, 16 February 2022).

Harsh government repression usually targets those who participate in marches against the government. On 17 and 18 March 2024, [peaceful protests](#) took place in various parts of Cuba. The protesters shouted slogans such as "Electricity and food"; «Homeland and Life»; "Freedom"; "No to violence"; "The people, united, will never be defeated" etc.. These protests have been the largest on the Island since those in Caimanera (Guantánamo) in May 2023; Havana in September 2022; Nuevitas (Camagüey) in August 2022; and those of 11 and 12 July 2021 (11J) in various parts of the country (Justicia 11J, 21 March 2024).

According to the Cuban Conflict Observatory, in April 2024, [633](#) public protests were recorded, which represent a minimum difference of 3.22% in relation to the 654 compiled in March, and 41.55% more than the 370 protest demonstrations registered in the same month of 2023. Protesters were most active in Havana with 225, followed by Santiago de Cuba, Camaguey, Matanzas, Guantanamo, Holguin and Villa Clara.

The September protests focusing on economic and social rights exceeded those dealing with civil and political rights by 11.21%. Protests addressed issues linked with food insecurity and inflation, the wave of social violence and citizen insecurity and discontent with public services, among others (Observatorio Cubano de Conflictos, 2 October 2023). As of April 2024, there were 1,099 [political prisoners](#) on the island (Prisoners Defenders, 21 May 2024).

In addition to the protests, another recent sign of [citizen dissatisfaction](#) was the low turnout in the March 2023 elections. All 470 legislators for the country's National Assembly were elected, but there were no opposition candidates to vote for. Overall turnout declined 10 percent compared to the last National Assembly vote in 2018 (CFR, 25 April 2023).

Human Rights Watch [reported](#) that the Cuban government continued to repress and punish virtually all forms of dissent and public criticism in 2022 (HRW 2023 Cuba country chapter). HRW highlighted how the authorities employed arbitrary detention to intimidate activists and political opponents, controlled all media in Cuba and restricted access to outside information.

## Cuban relations with other countries

Despite the progress made between Barack Obama (USA) and Raul Castro (Cuba) in the past, the current situation has remained tense. Prior to elections in November 2020, US-President Trump continued the implementation of harsh sanctions against Cuba. Due to the 11J protests, President Biden and other US officials expressed solidarity with the Cuban protesters and criticized the government's repression. In July and August 2021, the US Treasury Department [imposed](#) four rounds of targeted financial sanctions on Cuban security entities and officials involved in actions to suppress the protests. In November 2021 and January 2022, the US State Department imposed visa restrictions on officials implicated in suppressing a planned civic march and those involved in the imprisonment of participants in the protests on 11 July 2021 (CRS, 13 May 2022).

In May 2022, the Biden administration [relaxed](#) some of its policies towards the island. It expanded immigrant visa processing at the US Embassy in Havana and eased travel restrictions by reauthorizing scheduled and charter flights to cities beyond Havana and reinstating group travel. It also eased restrictions on sending cash remittances by eliminating the dollar and frequency limits for family remittances and reauthorizing donative (i.e., non-family) remittances to Cuban nationals (CRS, 4 April 2024).

During the year 2022, the USA sent its [first deportation flight](#) to Cuba since 2020. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said the Cuban government had agreed to "take no retaliatory action" against deportees and that US officials in Havana were planning to monitor Cuba's commitment (CBS, 25 April 2023). The US Department of Homeland Security also announced the [reopening](#) of a field office at its embassy in Havana that will support the processing of cases within its family reunification programs (Voz de América, 17 August 2023).

However, none of these definitively reversed the blockade imposed by the Trump administration. The current US [sanctions](#) includes restrictions of transactions with entities controlled by the Cuban Military (ministries, hotels, businesses) and restrictions on travel and remittances. Additionally, since 2021, the Secretary of State redesignated Cuba as a state sponsor of international terrorism, citing its harboring of several U.S. fugitives and members of Colombia's National Liberation Army. (CRS, 04 April 2024). Recently, in May 2024, the U.S. government [removed](#) Cuba from a short list of countries the United States alleges are "not cooperating fully" in its fight against terrorism. This list, which the State Department is required by law to provide the U.S. Congress, is different from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list (Reuters, 15 May 2024).

The European Parliament issued [resolution 2024/2584](#), on the critical situation in Cuba and called attention about how, despite the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and its Member States and the Republic of Cuba (EU-Cuba PDCA), the lack of democracy and freedom in Cuba had not improved, but on the contrary, had further deteriorated. Among other aspects, it reiterated the call to adopt sanctions against those responsible for the persistent violations of human rights in Cuba, starting with the sanctioning of Miguel Díaz-Canel (Europarl, 29 February 2024).

Regarding the relationship between Cuba and other countries, there has been a notable rapprochement with Russia. At the beginning of November 2023, the governments of Russia and Cuba [signed](#) a commercial and economic cooperation agreement (valid until 2030) aiming to promote the

growth of bilateral trade and investment (Prensa Latina, 2 November 2023). A visit by the president of Iran in June 2023 was also significant: Both the Iranian and Cuban governments are currently facing US sanctions. During the visit, representatives of both governments signed [cooperation agreements](#) in foreign policy, telecommunications and justice (Swissinfo, 15 June 2023). In March 2024, Cuba and Turkey signed an [agreement](#) on a bilateral economic agenda for the period 2024-2026 (14 y medio, 12 March 2024).

La Habana was chosen as the [location](#) for the peace talks between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army/ELN (APNews, 26 February 2024).

### **Gender perspective**

Cuba's political and legal landscape has continued to discriminate against women and girls. Although marriage and divorce laws give men and women broadly the same rights, marriage for girls as young as 14 and for boys as young as 16 is permitted with the consent of the parents, grandparents, legal guardian or the court (Family Code, Article 3). According to [Girls Not Brides Cuba profile](#), (accessed 24 June 2024), 29% of girls are married before the age of 18, and are thereby unlikely to finish their education, making them financial dependent on their husbands. According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights report on the "[Human rights situation in Cuba](#)", published on 3 February 2020, the Cuban legal framework has failed to incorporate into its legislation a definition of discrimination against women. Additionally, it highlights a legislative gap with regard to domestic and intra-family violence. Data gaps restrict comprehensive analysis, but reports indicate that domestic violence worsened in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ([Havana Times, 5 August 2021](#)).

According to the World Factbook Cuba, national service is [compulsory](#) for men for a duration of 2 years. Evading military service on grounds of [conscientious objection](#) is not legally possible (US State Department IRFR 2022 Cuba).



## Religious landscape

Cuba: Religious context	Number adherents	of %
Christians	6,843,000	61.2
Muslim	9,200	0.1
Hindu	23,500	0.2
Buddhist	6,200	0.1
Ethnic religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	810	0.0
Bahai	1,200	0.0
Atheist	475,000	4.3
Agnostic	1,879,000	16.8
Other	1,937,510	17.3
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

The [2019 Constitution](#) has had a significant impact on the religious landscape (CNCTV, January 2019). While it confirms that the state recognizes, respects and guarantees religious freedom, with different faiths enjoying equal consideration, it also makes conscientious objection illegal and [fails](#) (Baptist Press, 18 February 2019) to use [appropriate language](#) (USCIRF, 11 December 2018) for protecting religious freedom as stated in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Cuba signed in 2008. These provisions, in combination with other norms that limit the right to religious freedom in the country, represent a serious limitation in a country in which the legal framework considers the Communist Party of Cuba to be the leading political power in society controlling all political, economic and social order. Under this premise, every dimension of life in Cuba - including the religious dimension - must be structured according to that "superior ruling force".

One of the departments that oversee the implementation of regulations for religious entities is the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA), which was created in 1985 and is part of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba. According to the government, this office [works](#) to achieve the dissemination, understanding and implementation of the policy towards religious beliefs, believers, their institutions, organizations and fraternal associations (Permanent Mission of Cuba, November 2020). In practice, ORA is used to control churches and other religious institutions in the country. Since 1941, the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) has acted as a bridge between the government and around 28 church denominations. It [describes](#) itself as a non-governmental, Christian-inspired entity whose vision is to be an ecumenical fellowship of churches (CCC, 2022). Authorizations, permits,

registration, etc. are more easily and promptly provided for member churches, if they continue to be allied with the government. In 2019, seven evangelical denominations which did not feel represented by the CCC united to [form](#) the Evangelical Alliance of Cuba (Evangelical Focus, 14 June 2019). The state has not granted official recognition to this body and their church leaders have been facing continued harassment from government officials. In 2022, the Department of Attention to Religious Institutions and Fraternal Associations was [created](#) especially for dealing with such bodies as the CCC and those churches that are not part of the CCC (Granma, 17 March 2022).

Government attitudes towards churches depend upon whether they submit to government orders and ideology and vary according to the status of the church. The July 2022 USCIRF report "Constitutional Reform and Religious Freedom in Cuba" mentions state-created [umbrella faith organizations](#), and, in addition to the CCC, names the Yoruba Cultural Association, the Islamic League of Cuba, and Pastors for Peace. These proxy organizations are used to dominate the representative space of genuine religious organizations. Hence, FoRB repression includes CCC members but is much more profound for independent churches and other faith organizations.

The 2022 reform of the criminal code included new crimes targeting dissent and independent media (as mentioned above in: Political and legal landscape). Among the modifications is one related to the abuse of religious freedom. The New Penal Code [establishes](#): "Whoever, abusing the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion of his preference, opposes the religious belief he professes or the religion he practices to the objectives of education, or to the duty to work, defend the Homeland through armed struggle when no other resource is possible, reverence its symbols or any others established by the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, is sanctioned with imprisonment from six months to one year or a fine of one hundred to three hundred quotas or both" (Cubadebate, February 2022). [Before](#) the modification, this article indicated as a sanction deprivation of liberty from three months to one year or a fine of one hundred to three hundred quotas, not both (Gaceta Oficial, 20 February 2020). It is important to emphasize that core Christian values (especially those relating to freedom) contradict the totalitarian and repressive methods used by the regime to stay in power. Hence, the government uses different avenues for limiting the freedom of speech of religious leaders (such as these legislative reforms) when Christians openly challenge the Communist Party and government practice.

In the Pastoral Plan 2023-2030, the Catholic Church, as an institution, [recognized](#) the crisis of the Church, which lacks pastoral staff and means of evangelization, but also the Cuban crisis in general (DW, 19 August 2023). Since 2021, Catholic and evangelical leaders have stood in support of the general population, advocating for the release of political prisoners and [denouncing](#) the abuses perpetrated against detainees (LopezDoriga, 23 April 2023). They have also been demanding guarantees for the right to peaceful protest and the respect of civil rights. Some of them have even carried out [symbolic actions](#) in protest against the deplorable situation of basic services on the Island (14 y medio, 18 May 2024). Recently, in an attempt to respond to the critical situation, the Catholic Church called for a national dialogue and offered to [mediate](#) between the government and the opposition (ABC International, 24 April 2024).

While carrying out such activities as listed above, church leaders and their families have faced various forms of hostility. According to the July 2022 [USCIRF Constitutional Reform report](#), 93% of those surveyed claimed to be suffering from government repression and all of them knew of Christians who

had faced searches, surveillance and fled the country. The most common acts of government hostility were the use of threats, judicial summons and arrests. A common form of pressure was to isolate dissident religious leaders from their congregations. Other forms of persecution used by the authorities to target church leaders and their communities were:

- Threats of dismissal, slander, defamation, travel restrictions, death threats, home-raids, '[acts of repudiation](#)' (ADN Cuba, 15 November 2021).
- [Arbitrary arrests](#) (Radio Televisión Marti, 15 November 2021) According to CSW, the government continued to [detain](#) religious leaders from multiple faith communities and handed down harsh prison sentences for participating in July 2021 protests. (US State Department, May 2023). Many church leaders and other Christians activists detained in past reporting periods [remain in jail](#), without due process and with no expectation of being released any time soon (El Debate, 31 October 2023).
- [Expulsions](#) from the country (The Washington Times, 3 August 2022), preventing church leaders from carrying out Christian activities, refusal to [renew](#) church leaders' residence permits (Vida Nueva Digital, 30 September 2022) and hindering them from [leaving](#) the country to make visits abroad (Cubonet, 6 July 2023).
- Unjustified [police citations](#) (Cibercuba, 27 December 2023) and [fines](#) (Aciprensa, 21 October 2022).
- [Surveillance](#) (Cubonet, 20 July 2023).
- The Cuban police have also used the method of attacking the livelihoods of the pastors and their families to make them resign.
- Church leaders have had to [stop publishing](#) anything criticizing the government (Cuba Trendings, 6 April 2021).
- Christian leaders have been denied entry to hospitals, hindering religious assistance to the [sick](#) (El Nacional, 9 March 2024) and access to [political prisoners](#) (Instituto Patmos, 20 March 2024).
- According to church leaders and former inmates, Cuban authorities continued to [arbitrarily deny prisoners](#), including political prisoners, pastoral visits and the ability to meet with other prisoners for worship, prayer, and study. CSW noted that, on multiple occasions, prison authorities denied imprisoned Pastor Rosales Fajardo permission to participate in religious ceremonies within the prison (US State Department, IRFR 2022 Cuba),
- Several cases of church vandalism and [robberies](#) were recorded (Cubonet, 9 November 2023). In the previous reporting period (WWL 2024), church leaders affirmed that some incidents were faked robberies intended to intimidate critical clergy.
- In some cases, church buildings have continued to be targeted by the authorities and regime sympathizers, including threats of forced closure, [vandalism](#) (Facebook, 12 October 2021) and demolition, especially in the case of [non-registered churches](#) (Panam Post, 2 August 2022). The new expropriation law also poses a risk to the permanence of places of worship.
- Applications for registration sent in by many church communities have been rejected by the authorities which has led to those groups being regarded as criminals in their neighborhoods. State action has also [targeted](#) some legally registered churches as well (El Debate, 2 August 2022). According to CSW, many religious groups continued to state their [lack of legal registration](#) impeded their ability to practice their religion. The housing authority informed a pastor of another unregistered church, of an order for the immediate confiscation of the property where

his congregation met. While authorities did not seize the property, the confiscation order remained in effect through year's end (US State Department, IRFR 2022 Cuba).

- Citing the organization Outreach Aid to the Americas, the US State Department mentioned that faith organizations were being charged high utility rates. While most non-state entities received subsidies to offset these costs, religious associations reportedly did not receive this benefit (US State Department, IRFR 2022 Cuba).
- Some prayer events had to be anceled after severe threats were issued by the Cuban government (CSW, 27 April 2022). On other occasions, cultural events linked to church activities were also arbitrarily canceled (Diócesis de Santa Clara, 22 May 2023). In the present reporting period (WWL 2025), authorities banned Holy Week processions in different cities of the country, apparently due to the regime's fear of demonstrations possibly developing (Aciprensa, 27 March 2024).

These patterns of harassment, arbitrary arrests and mistreatment by authorities against religious leaders and members of religious associations and groups have recently been the subject of attention by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and the Group of Labor on Arbitrary Detention, among others. In November 2023, these rapporteurs asked the Cuban government for explanations about the acts of hostility to the detriment of various religious leaders in the country (Communication AL CUB 4/2023). According to USCIRF, Cuba is one of the countries of particular concern due to the serious situation of religious freedom in the country (USCIRF, December 2023).

On the other hand, "LGBTQIA+ friendly" churches are known to accuse traditional Christian churches of being trans/homophobic (Iglesia de la Comunidad Metropolitana en Cuba, 17 May 2023).

The report on Religious Freedom in Cuba carried out by the Social Rights Observatory, based on interviews with 1,394 people aged 18 years and over, has indicated that 68% of those interviewed admit that they or someone they know and who professes a religion have been harassed, threatened or obstructed for reasons related to their faith, to some extent. The most prominent reasons why a Christian may face harassment, threats or discrimination are two: "Having a political position based on Christian faith" or "Speaking publicly about Christian faith". Among the difficulties suffered by religious communities, it is mentioned that for Catholics (21% of those surveyed) the situations that have occurred the most are "Denying permission for events in public spaces" (59%) and "Denying permission for church activities or permitting them under certain conditions" (57%); for Protestants it was "Denying permission for building or repairing places of worship, or giving permission under certain conditions" (70%) (Cuban Observatory of Human Rights, June 2023).

Enrollment in state schools is mandatory and in general, the educational system has as its main objective indoctrination in communist principles (El Toque, 30 January 2024). The rights of Christian parents to educate their children according to their religious convictions is seriously limited since regime ideology and the idolization of Fidel Castro occurs mainly through the textbooks used in state schools (Facebook, 10 January 2022). There are also complaints of the use of children in the regime's electoral campaigns (OLA, 25 March 2023). The case of Pastor Rigal, sentenced to two years in prison for homeschooling (Assist News Service, 24 April 2019), has served as a warning to other parents trying to avoid such state indoctrination of their children. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, a mother and a girl were questioned at a police station because the mother was refusing to allow the child to be

indoctrinated at school (Radio Televisión Martí, 13 April 2023). In general, parents who do not accept the indoctrination of their children are threatened with losing custody of their children.

In June 2021, the Ministry of Education [approved](#) a comprehensive sexual education program for schools (Centro UC, Derecho y Religión, June 2021). Christian communities and churches expressed their [concern](#) about the way faith-based views were being seriously denigrated (ACBOCOO, 22 May 2021). The [Cuban Catholic bishops](#) also pointed out that the program did not take sufficient account of the fundamental rights of parents to raise their children in accordance with their religious views (Vatican News, 22 June 2021). However, due to the COVID-19 crisis, in September 2021, the head of the School Health Department of the [Ministry of Education](#) postponed the implementation of the program until further notice (Mined, 14 September 2021).

The Family Code also has the [potential](#) to strengthen the ability of the government to force church leaders and others into compliance. A referendum was held on 25 September 2022 to approve amendments to the Family Code of the Cuban Constitution. The referendum passed, thus legalizing a range of demands put forward by pressure groups involving sexuality, marriage and adoption. Article 191 gives the government the right to remove children from their homes if their parents fail to fulfil a list of responsibilities detailed in Article 138 (ñ). These include the duties to instil in their children ‘love for the Homeland, respect of its symbols, and respect for the authorities’. In 2022, CSW noted a significant increase in reported FoRB cases which included government threats to remove custodial rights from parents.

These are just some of the aspects that have concerned various Christian denominations in Cuba. During the process of approval of the Family Code amendments, pastors who were vocal against the changes [faced harassment](#) (Radio Television Martí, 11 February 2022) and church services were [disrupted](#) by militant activists (Evangelico Digital, 8 June 2022). Pressure groups also used social media to [insult](#) and/or minimize faith-based views (Cuba Trendings, 7 June 2022). In general, during the WWL 2025 reporting period, the repression of the Cuban Church continued in a highly visible manner with the Church being falsely accused of instigating protests against the government, especially those of 2021.

### Gender perspective

Christian women and girls often experience pressure in Cuban society for their more conservative sexual values, particularly those who speak out against abortion, or other issues related to their religious convictions. Female activists are not exempt from severe pressure from the regime and have also been subjected to arrests and interrogation ([Havana Times, 10 March 2023](#)).

Christian men are however more likely to be arrested since they more often hold leadership positions from which they can speak out against the government ([CSW, 26 July 2022](#)).

### Economic landscape

According to the [UNDP Human Development Report Cuba](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **Gross national income (GNI) per capita (2022):** 7,953
- **GNI per capita for women:** 5,571
- **GNI per capita for men:** 10,373

- ***Inequality in income:*** Data is not available
- ***Multidimensional Poverty Index (2019):*** 0.003

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the 2023-2024 growth projections in Cuba, will have an increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 1.8% in 2023 and 1.7% in 2024. According to the [document](#), between June 2022 and June 2023, inflation in Cuba tended to accelerate, with an increase of 16.5 percentage points (ECLAC, 2023). According to the Circle of Latin American Studies, the economic performance in 2023 remains [below](#) the authorities' forecasts, which only expected an increase in GDP of around 2%. Citing ECLAC, the report maintains that both exports of goods (-10.7%) and imports (-30.8%) maintained very negative performances (CESLA, December 2023).

According to the National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI), [interannual inflation](#) in Cuba's formal market stood at 33.17% in March 2024 (Cibercuba, 24 April 2024). In February 2024, the consumer price index (CPI) [increased](#) by 2.92% compared to the previous month. All categories experienced year-on-year price increases, most at double-digit rates (Infobae, 15 March 2024). The economic crisis has hit all Cubans, and it was intensified by various state measures that have taken place as a result of the [Planning Law](#) since 2021 (Gaceta Oficial, 10 December 2020), which has caused [significant changes](#) at an economic level (Periodismo de Barrio, 18 January 2021). In this context, the government's difficulties in producing and importing all necessary goods has given rise to a growing black market, with high prices in many cases. The government [recognizes the seriousness](#) of the fuel shortages and its impact on the economy, but blames the situation on the US sanctions. These affect not only food and medicine imports but also public transportation (El País, 29 September 2023). Given the limitations of public transport, educational centers are [replacing](#) many face-to-face classes with virtual ones online (Los Angeles Times, 24 April 2023).

The US sanctions have [paralyzed](#) foreign investment and also reduced the levels of tourism (US Department of the Treasury, accessed 3 September 2021). Nonetheless, since some measures were made more flexible since May 2022 (see above: Political and Legal landscape), it is expected that this will generate some positive impact on the economic situation of the country. Unfavorable for the Cuban economy were the effects of the fuel storage fire in Matanzas and of Hurricane Ian at the end of September 2022. The sectors most disrupted were agriculture, housing, electricity services and tourism (CESLA, November 2022). The June 2023 floods and the Tropical Storm Idalia in August 2023 have also impacted the livelihoods of many Cubans in several provinces.

The economic crisis has compelled the Communist Party to restructure its national economic plan. The Ministry of Economy and Planning [launched](#) a National Plan for Economic and Social Development 2030, which includes strategies for gender issues, the reduction of inequalities, economic growth, environmental sustainability and zero hunger (MEP, 2022). Nonetheless, the serious economic crisis in the country forced the government to remove Alejandro Gil Fernández from the position of Minister of Economy and he is currently being investigated by the island's Ministry of the Interior for "[grave errors](#)" committed while in office (Reuters, 8 March 2024). Due to the worsening situation, in February 2024, the government officially [requested help](#) from the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) for the first time (BBC News, 29 February 2024).

In December 2023, the government announced [new economic policy initiatives](#) aimed at "correcting distortions and boosting the economy", such as increasing fuel prices, electricity prices for certain households, or raising transportation rates. It is also considered the boost to the recovery of remittances, the increase in foreign exchange earnings, the recovery of tourism and the boost to the production of nickel, tobacco and rum. Other measures are related to international trade, tariff regulations, reduction of subsidies, etc. (El País, 21 December 2023).

In August 2023, the Central Bank of Cuba issued [resolution 111/2023](#), through which limits are established for cash collections and payments in national currency. A maximum [limit](#) of five thousand Cuban pesos per transaction has been imposed for cash collections and payments, seeking to promote 'banking' and the use of electronic payment channels, instead of the use of cash (France 24, 3 August 2023). At the close of 2023, the Central Bank of Cuba recognized that problems [affecting the implementation](#) of the banking process were persisting, including such factors as the resistance of the population, inadequate regulation and obsolescence of technological equipment (Infobae, 7 April 2024).

The Cuban government announced in June 2021 that it would [stop accepting](#) cash bank deposits in dollars due to the US blockade (France24, 17 June 2021). This decision affected all those receiving remittances from family members abroad. However, in 2023, the government announced that banks in Cuba would once [again be accepting](#) cash deposits in US dollars (BBC News, 11 April 2023). The announcement coincided with the [re-establishment](#) of remittance shipments from the USA through the Western Union company, a service suspended by the Trump administration in 2020 (Swissinfo, 2 March 2023).

In general, Christians face the same economic hardships as all other citizens. From in-country sources, it is known that Christians who - for faith-related reasons - do not have an endorsement from regime organizations (such as the Communist Youth, the Communist Women's Group, the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution, etc.), do not have any chance of state employment, thus increasing their lack of access to economic resources.

The small amounts of support that local churches receive through foreign donations are constantly monitored and can be a reason for being fined by the authorities. Attempts by the government to [increase the use of banking](#) and electronic payment systems make monitoring more constant (Bloomberg, 7 August 2023). Reports from in-country sources have revealed that non-monetary donations made to churches have at times been confiscated and resold by the government. Also, as a way of reprisal against Christian business owners (mostly pastors), their businesses have been arbitrarily fined or closed down for allegedly not being included in the list of activities allowed by the government or as an economic reprisal to their support to demonstrators. In addition, it is very difficult for some churches to offer humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable when they themselves are struggling to get minimum funds to survive.

### **Gender perspective**

Women do not experience discrimination in relation to inheritance (Civil Code, Article 514) and girls typically have equal access to education as boys. Women and girls remain financially disadvantaged however, due to the high child marriage rate for Cuban girls, and fewer employment opportunities ([Girls Not Brides Cuba](#), accessed 24 June 2024). The female labor force participation rate is 41.3%,

compared to 68.3% for men, in part due to societal norms which place women in the domestic sphere ([World Bank, Gender Data Portal 2023](#)).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the [World Factbook Cuba](#) (accessed 24 June 2024):

- **Main ethnic groups:** White 64.1%, Mulatto or mixed 26.6%, Black 9.3% (2012 est.)
- **Main language:** Spanish
- **Urban population:** 77.5% of total population (2023)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.7% (% ages 15 and older)
- **Population below poverty line:** No data available

According to [World Bank Cuba data](#) (accessed 24 June 2024):

- **Education:** The school enrollment for pre-primary (2021) is 100%; for primary (2022) is 99.873% and for secondary (2022) 104%. The duration of compulsory education is 9 years.
- **Unemployment (modeled ILO estimate):** 1.177% (2023)
- **Gender Parity Index:** 1% (2021). This refers to the ratio of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.

According to the [UNDP Human Development Report Cuba](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** Cuba's HDI value for 2022 is 0.764. The variation in HDI rank between 2015 and 2022 is -4.
- **Life expectancy (2022):** Female (80.6), Male (75.8).
- **Gender inequality:** (I.e. the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in the three GII dimensions) Cuba has a GII value of 0.300, ranking it 73 out of 193 countries in the 2022 index.

### Protests against shortages

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis in the country worsened, and the situation remains critical. Cuban citizens were already facing great difficulties obtaining sufficient income to survive on, but the introduction of lockdown measures, the closing of borders and the latest economic reforms have all impacted the economy, caused widespread poverty and created shortages in basic goods, medicines and services. In addition, there are continual power-cuts (Imneuquen, 19 March 2024) and food shortages (DW, 28 February 2024). For the first time, the government has asked the UN World Food Program (WFP) for help to facilitate the shipment of milk to children under seven years of age (El País, 29 February 2024). Parallel to this, there is an ongoing housing crisis that has forced several families to live in collective shelters, administered by state authorities; these lack many basic necessities: Many Cubans have no running water available and have to stand in long queues for water, food, medicines and fuel (Directoriocubano, 24 October 2024). According to the Cuban Observatory of Human Rights, placing the poverty threshold at \$1.90 per day per person, for a household of 3 members and according to the total income reported per household, 88% of Cubans live below the poverty threshold (OCDH, September 2023). In addition, there is a severe shortage of construction materials (Martiverifica, 26 January 2024).



The scale of the crisis caused anger to erupt among the general public and in July 2021, for the first time in decades, Cubans staged protests against the government (BBC News, 12 July 2021). Further large-scale peaceful demonstrations were suppressed by the government, as occurred in September 2022, May 2023 and March 2024.

### **Mass emigration**

Mass emigration has become a significant problem (El Pais, 14 September 2022), and in the short term its impact on social and economic life will worsen with the departure of almost a generation of young people of working age and an elderly population that depends on them for the pension system to function. The crisis in the country has reached such magnitude that it has caused what some call "the biggest exodus" since Fidel Castro came to power in the country (NY Times, 12 December 2022). The US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reported that in fiscal year 2023, which ended in September, 200,287 had tried to enter US territory illegally (US Customs and Borders Protection, 14 October 2023). The mass exodus in the last two years is equivalent to almost 4% of Cuba's total population (Infobae, 25 October 2023). From October 2023 to April 2024, 144,378 encounters were recorded between CBP officers and Cuban citizens (US Customs and Borders Protection, 22 May 2024). Thus, although the situation in Cuba has long been critical, the current situation is evidently making life on the island unsustainable for many (due to the shortages, lack of opportunities, restrictions on fundamental freedoms and government repression). Especially young people lack future perspectives. Christian leaders have spoken publicly about the situation and have drawn attention to the problems of unemployment, migration, poverty and human rights violations. The Bishops of Cuba have especially warned about the lack of food and medicine, as the most serious crisis in recent decades (El Debate, 18 August 2023).

This scenario makes the help that churches and various civil society organizations can provide essential. However, the risks that organizations with foreign contacts face are substantial as can be seen in Article 143 of the New Penal Code, which states that "a prison sentence of four to ten years" is incurred by any Cuban who, "by himself or on behalf of non-governmental organizations [NGOs], international institutions, associations, or any natural or legal person of the country or a foreign State, supports, promotes, finances, provides, receives or has in his possession funds, material or financial resources, for the purpose of financing activities against the State and its constitutional order" (adnamerica, 27 January 2022). In other words, the Cuban government could imprison those who receive foreign funding to support perceived anti-government activities, including any organization that the state considers to be too vocal in criticism, even when that criticism is not of a political or ideological nature. Faith-based organizations are thus permanently in danger of being perceived as dissidents.

Various government measures continue to stifle the humanitarian operations carried out by faith-based organizations:

- The US State Department stated in its International Religious Freedom Report 2023 that despite increased shortages of food, medicine, and other essential items, authorities greatly restricted many religious organizations' ability to receive and distribute humanitarian assistance: "While the government allowed Caritas to continue to assist the needy, it did not allow many smaller religious groups and charities that were not part of the government-recognized CCC to provide

aid. Other religious leaders also said the government continued to restrict their ability to receive donations from overseas."

- According to the Patmos Institute reporting on 24 April 2023: "Any humanitarian aid or resources that are shared in the community must always go through the filter of government control"; "the Government identifies community influence as a capital of political influence that it does not wish to share with anyone, regardless of whether it is the community that suffers the consequences."

### Gender perspective

The Constitution of the Republic (Article 36) and the Family Code (Article 2) provide equal rights to men and women in relation to marriage and family relations. In practice however, the country continues to operate according to patriarchal norms; women are expected to assume more responsibilities in the domestic sphere with traditional gender stereotypes persisting. Domestic violence reportedly soared during the COVID-19 pandemic (Foreign Policy, 24 July 2022).

### Technological landscape

According to [DataReportal Digital 2024: Cuba](#) (23 February 2024) / survey date – January 2024:

- **Internet usage:** 73.2% penetration rate
- **Social media usage:** 59.9% of the total population
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** 59% of the total population

According to the [Inclusive Internet Index 2022 Cuba](#):

- Cuba ranks 83rd globally and last among 16 Latin American countries. It also ranks last in both 'Availability' and 'Affordability', relative to other countries in the region. 'Quality' also remains a particular concern, as Cuba ranks 99th out of 100 countries in the Index, a partial result of deterioration in mobile and broadband speeds.

According to [Freedom on the Net 2023 Cuba](#):

- Cuba is a not free country (Score 20/100): Internet freedom in Cuba remained severely limited. Mobile and fixed-line internet service is very expensive for most Cubans. In addition, since the nationwide July 2021 protests, the government has regularly used its complete control of the mobile network to restrict citizens' communications. The government tactic of implementing short-term internet shutdowns to quell the spread of protests appears to have become increasingly commonplace.
- Cuban authorities continue to regularly block dissident or independent news outlets and the websites of Cuban activists and dissident organizations. Reports indicate that Cuba has begun to use Chinese technology in its ongoing effort to block and filter some online content. A June 2020 report by the cybersecurity organization Qurium concluded that the government may use blocking technologies developed by Chinese companies, including deep packet inspection (DPI) tools. On the other hand, the vague wording of government provisions regarding content regulation allows the authorities to censor a wide array of posts without judicial oversight. In recent years, multiple journalists, journalism professors, and students have been expelled from their state positions or universities for publishing criticism on social media sites and in "enemy" media outlets, including online outlets.

In May 2023, the National Assembly gave its unanimous approval to the Social Communication Law. The final text used significantly more rigid language regulating Cubans' ability to freely publish content online than earlier drafts of the bill. In particular, the Social Communication Law further closes the already very limited space for independent digital media outlets in the country. Decree Law 370 of 2019 further restricted independent media by prohibiting the hosting of websites on foreign servers and the circulation of "information contrary to the social interest, morals, good customs, and integrity of the people".

Cubans have organized several high-profile protests in recent years, with social media—especially Facebook—playing a critical role in driving offline demonstrations. The Cuban government has routinely responded to these efforts with connectivity restrictions, arbitrary detentions, and legislation seeking to further criminalize online dissent. Many journalists working for nonstate media have experienced systematic harassment and threats, including death threats and online smear campaigns. Some faced sustained harassment, threats, connectivity disruptions, and de facto house arrest, driving them into exile. Journalists have also been prohibited from traveling abroad.

According to Reporters Without Borders ([World Press Freedom 2024 Cuba](#)):

- Cuba remains the worst country for press freedom in Latin America, scoring 25.63 points and located at 168/180 position. Television, radio, and newspapers are all closely monitored by the government. The Constitution prohibits privately owned press. Independent journalists are closely watched by state security officers, who try to restrict their movements and periodically interrogate them, deleting information from their devices. Access to the Internet is still mostly controlled by the state. Bloggers and journalists can express themselves online but do so at their own risk. They are often subjected to harassment that may range from being held for questioning to being placed under house arrest to prevent them from covering major events. Arrests, arbitrary detentions, threats of imprisonment, persecution and harassment, illegal raids on homes, confiscation and destruction of equipment – all this awaits journalists who do not toe the Cuban Communist Party line. The authorities also control foreign journalists' coverage by granting accreditation selectively, and by expelling those considered "too negative" about the government.

Norms such as [Decree Law 389](#) (Havana Times, 25 November 2020) legalize electronic surveillance without court authorization. [Decree Law 370](#) (Civil Rights Defenders, 18 June 2020) penalizes the dissemination of information contrary to "social interest", "morals" and "good customs" on social media, restricting freedom of expression. [Decree Law 35](#) (Official Gazette, 92, August 17, 2021) deals with cybersecurity. Several human rights organizations and independent media have denounced the violation of fundamental human rights caused by the application of this law which is used to interrogate, threaten, confiscate equipment (especially that of journalists) and to impose exorbitant fines on those who "spread information contrary to the common good, morals, decency, and integrity through public data transmission networks". Also, it imposes broad obligations on service providers to censor online content without judicial oversight or transparency measures. According to CSW: "This new cybersecurity law [criminalizes](#) any online criticism of the government, as well as incitement to 'public disturbances' which is the term the government uses to describe the peaceful protest marches that took place across the island on 11 July [2021]. According to Legal Decree 35, any dissemination of 'content that violates the constitutional, social and economic precepts of the State, that incites

mobilizations or other acts that affect public order; that spreads messages that justify violence, accidents of any kind that affect the privacy and dignity of people' will now be considered cyberterrorism. This gives the government sweeping and subjective powers to crack down on freedom of expression and related rights like FoRB." (CSW, February 2022). The [New Penal Code](#) (Amnesty International, 2 December 2022) criminalizes freedom of speech - affecting independent journalists and activists - and penalizes anyone who "endangers the constitutional order and the normal functioning of the government". It also retains the death penalty.

In June 2023, the National Assembly approved a [new Social Communication Law](#), which aims to regulate the press and repress freedom of expression that goes against the interests of the Communist Party. Among other things, it stipulates that the media are "socialist property of all the people or of political, mass, and social organizations, and cannot be the object of any other type of property." It also indicates that the press cannot be used with the objective of subverting the constitutional order and destabilizing the socialist state, which, according to some analysts, was already happening in practice (Latam Journalism Review, 27 June 2023). The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights - IACHR expressed its [concern](#) over the approval of the Social Communication Law in Cuba, which contravenes international human rights standards and intensifies censorship (IACHR, June 2023). Recently, both offices drew [attention](#) to the persistence of repressive actions against the independent press. Among them, a state policy aimed at maintaining control over the flow of information, limiting civic space and access to information by Cuban society. They maintain that independent journalists and media outlets face a hostile environment, with legal restrictions and repressive practices for reporting critically about the Government. This includes fines and sanctions, siege and police surveillance of their residences, arrests, and intimidating interrogations (IACHR, 21 February 2024).

In addition to the legal framework, in practice the government [controls](#) the Cuban Telecommunications Company, as well as the infrastructure and the sector in general, enabling censorship practices (Yucabite, 18 June 2022) such as the deliberate slowing down of connection speeds, the interception of calls and private messaging via SMS, the confiscation of equipment such as computers and mobile phones, expulsion from state institutions, and fines for publishing content on social media. These are all government instruments for censoring opinions and discussions which the regime classes as dissent. In the protests that erupted in March 2024, the government again applied strategies such as [Internet cut-offs](#) in order to silence and carry out arbitrary arrests of protesters (Infobae 18 March 2024). It is common practice for the authorities to restrict Internet access in difficult political situations or during protests. According to NGO Access Now, in 2022 in Latin America, it was the Cuban government which [cut access to the Internet most often](#) (Access Now, February 2023).

On the island there is a context of [repression](#), persecution by police and intolerance of criticism, as well as disrespect for freedom of expression and the press (SIP, November 2023). Especially in the run-up to the protests called for November 2021, various journalists and media outlets were targeted by the government. Due to the restrictions and control measures, Christians (and any other citizens expressing views contrary to those of the regime on the Internet or through social media) risk being targeted and punished. Some of them also reported suspicious Internet [failure](#) (Cubanos por el Mundo, February 2023).

## Security situation

The Cuban regime has an internal counter-intelligence apparatus and an external intelligence agency, e.g. the Department of State Security (DSE), the General Directorate of Intelligence (DGI), the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DIM), the Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM) and the National Revolutionary Police (PNR). These agencies work together to ensure that the ruling party remains in power. Both pressure and violence are used with impunity against those who do not align with the Communist Party's guidelines.

The country's repressive climate is due mainly to government officials imposing Communist ideology on society. The government has continued to threaten and fine opponents and activists using [Decree Law 370](#) (effective as of 4 July 2019) which limits freedom of expression (Freedom House, Joint Statement, 6 May 2020) and Decree Law 35 (mentioned above in *Technological landscape*). Hence, dissidents, including Christians, face arrest, interrogation and surveillance by various state agents, often assisted by non-state agents. The latter are sympathizers, militants and neighborhood committees aligned with the Communist Party who act as the right arm of the regime in making sure that state ideology is adhered to in communities throughout the island. For instance, the neighborhood-level "Committees for the Defense of the Revolution" (CDRs) act as the eyes and ears of the regime and are designed as a "neighborhood watch system" in which neighbors are both watching and being watched. The police tap into this network for information concerning the friends, visitors, family background, work history and volunteer activities of any suspects as a form of intimidation and, at the same time, as a strategy to attract informers who serve the interests of the regime (not always out of their own free will). State security has sometimes used video recordings and photographs taken in churches to later fully identify those present.

In addition to abuses carried out by the security forces, there are also anonymous complaints used by the "State Security Organs" (OSE) to intimidate those who criticize or oppose regime policies. Such intimidation includes the practice of holding potential regime opponents for an hour or more in hermetically sealed vehicles, often in the sun. This method is known as "[patrulla-horno](#)" (Connectas, June 2021). At the time of potential demonstrations, the government stepped up the frequency of house arrests, the blocking of access to regime opponents' homes, 'acts of repudiation', interrogation, threats, dismissal of opposition supporters from their workplaces, threats of physical harm and kidnappings. The Cuban Observatory for Human Rights - OCDH identified in March 2023, [363 repressive actions](#), against journalists, activists and citizens; 64 of these actions occurred in the context of the elections held on March 26 to renew the National Assembly of People's Power (unicameral Parliament) (Infobae, 5 April 2023). In April 2024 alone, the organization reported [314 repressive actions](#), of which 75 were some forms of arbitrary detention and the other 239 abuses activist housing sites, threats, police summonses, trials and court rulings, among others (OCDH, 6 May 2024).

Christian leaders who are vocal against government acts of injustice are among those suffering from government repression. Several priests and pastors have faced [threats](#) (OLA, 29 March 2023), [acts of repudiation](#) (Cuba Net, 28 April 2024), [surveillance](#) (BBC, 16 April 2024), arbitrary arrest, [physical attacks](#) by security officers (Marti Noticias, 11 February 2022), and [abuse](#) as political prisoners (AND Cuba, 5 January 2024), [threats of being charged](#) with various crimes (Facebook post, 13 November 2021), home-searches and confiscation of goods, vandalism of church buildings and houses, and even [forced displacement](#) (CSW, 3 March 2022). Not only church leaders, but also those who work with

them or with Christian networks and media critical of the regime have also been [harassed](#) (Vida Cristiana, 4 November 2021). Churches have also become more frequently targeted for [robberies](#) (Cibercuba, 8 November 2023). Concerning robberies: In several cases, religious leaders suspect that what appears to be burglary are covert acts of intimidation. Where church leaders advocate for more freedom for the people and the improvement of their social conditions, they will be treated as opposition voices. In general, Christians face similar hostilities when they intend to share information with foreign organizations or Christian ministries about the situation of persecution they are experiencing, making it even more difficult to assist them and help them in publicizing the violation of their rights.

To this context of government repression must also be added the elements of insecurity caused by common crime, which has increased on the island due to [unsatisfied basic needs](#) and the worsening of the economic situation in the country (Diario de Cuba, 17 April 2023).

### **Gender perspective**

Cuba is a country of origin and transit for human trafficking, the victims of whom are mostly women and adolescents. According to the [US State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons report](#), within Cuba, the government did not report investigating, prosecuting, or convicting trafficking crimes. The Cuban authorities did not report identifying victims and lacked a comprehensive package of housing and other services for victims and did not protect potential trafficking victims from being detained or charged for unlawful acts which their traffickers coerced them into carrying out. According to the [World Bank Suicide mortality rate for 2019](#), the average suicide mortality rate in Cuba was 14.5; 6 per 100,000 inhabitants for women, compared to 23 for men.

### **Christian origins**

Christianity became established in Cuba in 1512 through Roman Catholic priests of the Dominican order; this was a consequence of Spanish colonization. The earliest Protestant activity dates back to 1741 when Cuba was under British occupation. Through the massive influx of slaves from Africa, a syncretistic cult called [Santería](#) developed around 1800, mixing elements of Roman Catholic faith with Yoruba customs (*Source: Learn Religions, 13 February 2019*).

After gaining independence from Spain in 1898, Cuba's dependency on the USA [facilitated](#) the establishment of many Protestant churches and movements including Methodists, Adventists, Presbyterians, Quakers, Baptists and Lutherans. Spiritism was also introduced at that time.

*(Source: Catholic Church and State in Cuba: Past and present relationships, April/August 2012)*

## Church spectrum today

Cuba: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	48,400	0.7
Catholic	6,068,000	88.7
Protestant	307,000	4.5
Independent	410,000	6.0
Unaffiliated	9,800	0.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,843,200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	185,000	2.7
Pentecostal-Charismatic	958,000	14.0

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

**Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".

The largest denomination in Cuba is by far the Roman Catholic Church. According to WCD 2024 estimates, 88.7% of Cuban Christians are Catholics, representing an increase of 0.5% compared to the previous year. However, other Christian denominations continue to have a visible presence; especially churches linked with the Pentecostal movement are growing and finding increasing acceptance among the population. According to in-country contacts, much of the growth of both Catholic and evangelical churches can be explained by the high levels of activism on the part of their leaders in social protests and in the defense of human rights. Despite being frequent targets for government retaliation, this has increased their respect and reputation in many sectors of society.

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Cuba>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.

## External Links

- Recent history: elected - <https://oncubanews.com/en/cuba/diaz-canel-confirmed-as-president-of-cuba/>
- Recent history: ending - <https://latinamericanpost.com/27912-cuba-balance-of-diaz-canels-first-year-in-the-presidency>
- Recent history: re-elected - <https://cubaminrex.cu/es/miguel-diaz-canel-reelecto-presidente-de-la-republica-de-cuba>
- Recent history: prime minister - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-50881820>
- Recent history: again - [https://elpais.com/internacional/2023-04-20/el-parlamento-cubano-reelige-a-diaz-canel-como-presidente-quien-apuesta-por-mas-continuidad-dentro-de-la-continuidad.html?event\\_log=oklogin](https://elpais.com/internacional/2023-04-20/el-parlamento-cubano-reelige-a-diaz-canel-como-presidente-quien-apuesta-por-mas-continuidad-dentro-de-la-continuidad.html?event_log=oklogin)
- Recent history: handed over - <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/cuban-president-diaz-canel-made-communist-party-leader-ending-castro-era-2021-04-19/>
- Recent history: fluctuations - <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-cuba-relations>
- Recent history: imposed - <https://www.state.gov/cuba-sanctions/>
- Recent history: tightened - <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-10-18/biden-leaves-cuba-in-the-deep-freeze>
- Recent history: reversed - <https://www.wola.org/analysis/us-cuba-relations-old-new-should-come-next/>
- Recent history: September 2022 - <https://observatoriocubano.com/2022/10/03/cuba-364-protestas-en-septiembre-cuba-mas-de-4-millones-de-cubanos-rechazan-el-socialismo-en-urnas-y-miles-en-las-calles/>
- Recent history: fire - <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/09/americas/matanzas-cuba-worst-fire-intl-hnk/index.html>
- Recent history: point out - <https://elpais.com/internacional/2022-08-09/una-serie-de-exposiciones-complica-la-extincion-del-incendio-en-unos-tanques-de-combustible-en-cuba.html>
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