



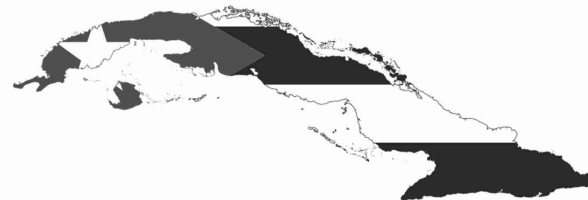
U.S. Citizenship  
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Services

# Cuba: Country Conditions



**RAIO Research Unit**

October 2021





# COI Challenges



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## **Lack of reliable, official data & information**

- Often incomplete & may be outdated
- Even less information on certain topics (military, state security, human rights violations, etc.)

## **No independent human rights monitoring**

## **Objective & non-biased COI is limited**

- Cuban state-run media
- Exile community
- Dissident groups
- Independent Cuban media & blogs
- Social media

## **Research Unit's Cuba ECN page**



# Cuba: State Control & Repression

## Repressive dictatorship since the 1960s

- Marxist-Leninist, one-party state
- Measures to control every aspect of people’s lives
- Repression of dissent

Historically, the State has attempted to control or monopolize:

Politics	Government	Economy	Employment	Housing	Religion
Healthcare	Education	Food	Media	Travel & Migration	Society

# Political Dissent



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## Dissent = political opposition

- Any activity that the state deems contrary to its own political agenda
- Viewed as “counter-revolutionary”
- Individuals labeled as dissidents

## *Gusano* (“worm”)

- Derogatory term used to describe individuals perceived to be:
  - in opposition to the government
  - critical of revolutionary ideology
  - spies of the United States
- Historically used to refer to Cuban exiles







# Theoretical Foundation of Repression



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*“Within the Revolution, everything. Against the Revolution, nothing.” - Fidel Castro (1961)*

**Public discourse = absolute support or rejection of the Cuban government**

**Laws, structure of government, & state control/monopoly of resources & services - used to maintain state control & ensure conformity**

**Anyone who is viewed as a threat to the system of government = subject to repression**



# Theoretical Foundation of Repression



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**Rights & freedoms exist, but cannot exercise them against the state & political system**

## **Freedom of expression**

- Dialogue is only permitted “within the revolution”
  - No public criticism of the regime, government officials, or state programs
  - Limited public debate on topics that are politically sensitive
  - Silencing of critics
- Formal media is owned & controlled by the state
- Independent media = illegal



# Theoretical Foundation of Repression



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## Freedom of Assembly

- Unauthorized public gatherings = illegal

## Freedom of Association

- Organizations must register with the government to receive official recognition
- Government refuses registrations of new groups if they are not state supervised
- Independent organizations (i.e. without official recognition) = illegal
- Membership in or association with an unregistered organization = illegal



# Legal Organizations



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**Society is organized into “mass organizations” of students, workers, women & farmers**

**Only a few legal organizations exist outside the state & party structure**

- Recognized churches, Freemasons, & some professional & fraternal organizations
- All other independent organizations = dissident groups

**Cuban Communist Party = only legal political party**

- All other political parties = illegal



# *Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC)*

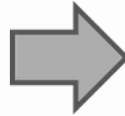
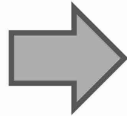


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***“highest political and leadership force in society and the State”***

- Monopoly on politics & government positions
- Cuban government is subordinate to the PCC

**PCC First Secretary = most powerful person in Cuba**





# *Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC)*



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## **Around 800,000 members (as of 2016)**

- About 7% of the population

## **Who might be a member?**

- All high-level government & military officials
- Most lower-level functionaries
- Leaders of labor & other mass organizations
- Long-time ban on religious believers - dropped in the 1990s





# *Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC)*



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## **Paths to consideration for membership**

- Selection as a “vanguard worker”
- Distinguished oneself in the *Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas* (UJC)
  - 2 year waiting period
  - Usually become members of the PCC at age 30

## **Membership is selective**

- Application & screening process
- Once a member, still need to meet Party standards
- Monitored & evaluated - membership becomes a proxy for political trustworthiness

# Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC)



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## Benefits of membership

- *“PCC membership is still required to obtain good jobs, suitable housing, and real access to social services, including medical care and educational opportunities”* – Freedom House, 2013
- *“Though not a formal requirement, party membership is a de facto prerequisite for high-level official positions and professional advancement in most areas”* – U.S. Dept. of State, 2011
- Preferential access to some material goods – Henkten, 2013
- *“anyone who is not a member of the Party has no possibility of attaining public office or participating in the representation of their government”*– IACHR, 2020
- *“educators commonly require PCC affiliation for career advancement”* – Freedom House, 2021

## Active support of the PCC and/or its activities

- *“to have peace of mind in the workplace and educational contexts”*
- Preferential treatment from the government, including in education & employment



# *Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC)*



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## **Youth wing of the PCC**

- Teach youth about socialism & involve them in community projects

## **Membership**

- Declining
  - Early 1990s = nearly 1.5 million members
  - 2017 = over 300,000 members; more than 33,000 grassroots committees
- Age = 16-30 years old
- Entry is voluntary & selective – via personal request or the assembly of exemplary young people
- Traditional benefits = access to jobs & education, good recommendations, dollar economy, etc.



## **Loss of relevance**



# Dissident Groups



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## Not homogenous

- Democratic change
- Apolitical (practice religion, organize a union, etc.)

## Hundreds of organizations/groups

- human rights defenders; journalists; trade unionists; political groups; religious organizations; civil society organizations; artists, etc.

## Dissidents

- Members of independent groups
- Individuals who criticize the government or abstain from cooperating with the state



# Dissident Groups



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## Small & isolated from the population

- Efficiency of the state at suppressing dissent
  - Dissident groups = illegal
  - Various techniques of repression, including infiltration by state agents & use of informants

## Perceptions

- Cuban government = agents of the U.S. government
- Cuban citizens = general skepticism



# Prominent Dissident Groups



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- ***Unión Patriótica de Cuba (UNPACU)***
- ***Damas de Blanco***
- ***Movimiento Cristiano de Liberación (MCL)***
- ***Partido por la Democracia Pedro Luis Vomitel***
- ***Partido por la Unidad Cristiana de Cuba***
- ***Frente Nacional de Resistencia “Orlando Zapata Tamayo”***
- ***Movimiento Opositor Juventud Despierta***
- ***Foro Anti totalitario Unido (FAU)***
- ***Partido de Unidad Nacional Democrática***
- ***Movimiento Independiente Opción Alternativa***
- ***Movimiento San Isidro***
- ***Instituto Cubano por la Libertad de Expresión y Prensa (ICLEP)***
- ***Asociación Pro Libertad de Prensa (ALPL)***
- ***Centro de Información Legal (Cubalex)***
- ***Asociación Cubana de Observadores Electorales (ACOE)***



# Legal Foundation of Repression



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## Laws are vague & broadly defined

- Crimes are not clearly defined in the penal code
  - “*impossible to know which acts are criminally punishable and which are not*”
  - Allows authorities wide discretion to deem almost any act of dissent as criminal in some way

## Laws are highly restrictive & deny basic civil & political rights to the population

- “*Virtually all activities are presumed illegal unless the law says otherwise*”



# Legal Foundation of Repression



U.S. Citizenship  
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Services

## Misuse of the penal code

- Legal guarantees are not respected
- Routinely used to criminalize or harass government opponents
  - Use of charges that are not clearly defined
  - Prosecuted for ordinary crimes

***“authorities make up facts and circumstances to convict independent activists for crimes that they have not committed”***



# Legal Foundation of Repression



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Illicit association	Enemy propaganda	Contempt	Public disorder
Damages	Aggression	Sedition	Resistance
Rebellion	Disobedience	Assault	Defamation
Hijacking	Terrorism	Sabotage	Espionage
Disrespect for authority	Spreading epidemics	Instigation to commit a crime	Unlawful economic activity
Non-payment of fines	Defiling national symbols	Collaboration with the United States	Pre-criminal social dangerousness
Acts contrary to the normal development of the minor	Evasion of prisoners & detainees	Defamation of institutions & organizations of heroes & martyrs	Acting against the independence or the territorial integrity of the state
Usurpation of public functions	Usurpation of legal capacity	Attempted commission	Diffusion of false news
Illegal entry into the National Territory	Illegal exit from the National Territory	Illegal slaughter of large livestock & sale of its meat	Prohibited games



# Crime & Illegal Activity



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**No reliable crime statistics, but violent crime is reportedly not common**

***“To varying degrees, everyone does something technically illegal to survive”***

- Black market
- Underground/informal economy
- Mostly overlooked, although periodic crackdowns do occur



# Agents of Repression



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***“Government officials, at the direction of their superiors, committed most human rights abuses. As a matter of policy, officials failed to investigate or prosecute those who committed these abuses. Impunity for the perpetrators remained widespread.” – U.S. DOS, 2021***

***“The military and intelligence agencies play an important role in suppressing dissent and wield deep influence over virtually every aspect of the state” – Freedom House, 2021***

# Ministry of the Interior (MININT)



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## Maintains domestic/internal security

- Control of police, internal security forces, & prison system
- System of informants
- Responsible for internal repression
  - Units were deployed to suppress peaceful protests in July 2021

## Organization

- State Security
- Internal Order & Crime Prevention
- Technical Operations





# MININT: *Departamento de Seguridad del Estado*



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## **Department of State Security (aka the “political police”)**

- Responsible for “crimes against the state,” such as espionage & sabotage
- Specialized units – monitor, infiltrate, & suppress opposition & independent political activity
- Surveillance of foreign officials, diplomats, academics, businesspersons, etc.



## MININT: *Brigada Especial Nacional (BEN), aka Boinas Negras*



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Services

### **Special forces unit**

- Confront counter-revolutionary, anti-social, & criminal activity
- Black berets & uniforms
- Suppressed & attacked protesters (July 2021)

# MININT: *Policia Nacional Revolucionaria* (PNR)



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## Primary law enforcement organization

- Has the most direct contact with the population

## Activities

- Suppress crime
- Support state security units & agents
  - Monitor the activities of individuals who have received official warnings
  - Arrest individuals of interest to state security
- Suppression & attacks of protesters (July 2021)
  - Arrests & beatings



# MININT: *Policia Nacional Revolucionaria* (PNR)



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Services

## Divided into local branches

### *Jefe de sector* = neighborhood police chief

- Prevent crime in area of control (4 sq. km)
- Investigate crime & detain suspects
- Maintain a list of “anti-social” individuals
- Issue warnings & fines
- Interview citizens
- Oversee the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs)



# Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR)



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Services

## Fusion of military & civilian roles

- Interpenetration of FAR & PCC
- Military officers govern large parts of military & civilian life

## Organization

- Army, Air Force, & Navy
- Militia, Army of Working Youth, Production & Defense Brigades, *Avispas Negras*



## Evolution of the FAR's Mission

- Defend the regime from foreign & domestic adversaries (1959-1965)
- Project state power abroad (1963-1991)
- Significantly support the Cuban economy (especially since the 1990s)



# *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR)*



U.S. Citizenship  
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Services

## **Historically, not used to repress dissent**

- Responsibility of MININT

## **Exceptions**

- Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP) (Nov. 1965 -1968)
- MINFAR units deployed to suppress protests (Jul. 2021)
  - *Tropas de Prevención*, aka *Boinas Rojas* (Red Berets)





# Military Service Requirements



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## Military service

- Active military service
- Reserve military service



## *Servicio Activo Militar (SMA)*

- Compulsory for males (17-28 years old)
- Duration = 2 years
- Basic military training
- Mainly—but not exclusively—in units of the army



# Military Service Requirements



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## General rejection of military service & efforts to legally avoid it

- Evasion & desertion are punishable by law
- No conscientious objection
- Postponement - possible until age 27
- Exemptions (mainly for medical reasons)

## Documentation issued upon completion or exemption

- *Documento de Baja o Licenciamiento del Servicio Militar* [Military Service Discharge Document]
- Certificate of Completion - issued by the military unit



# ***Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida (BRR)***



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**Government organized bands of civilians**

**Counter protests by government critics & help control outbreaks of popular discontent**

- Sent by the government to confront opponents in the streets, including with weapons & sticks
- Participate in acts of repudiation against activists & opponents

**Most active in the early 1990s, but allegedly used more frequently in recent years**



# Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (CDR)



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## “network of neighborhood block committees”

- *“We are going to implement, against imperialist campaigns of aggression, a Revolutionary system of collective surveillance where everybody will know who lives on their block and what relations they have with the tyranny; and what they devote themselves to; who they meet with; what activities they are involved in.” – Fidel Castro*

## Organization & structure

- Each block in every neighborhood has its own CDR
- President - submits information about citizens to authorities
- Not mandatory, but social pressure to join
  - Over 8 million members





# *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (CDR)*



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Services

## **Mechanism of surveillance & control**

- Defend the political system against “counter-revolutionary” activity & suppress dissent
- Monitoring of the population, including government opponents
- Reporting on counter-revolutionary & suspicious behavior & activities
- Mobilizing support for the government
- Repressive acts against dissidents, including acts of repudiation
- Keeping records of residents & visitors
- University & employment recommendations



# Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (CDR)



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## Community mobilization & address community needs

- Neighborhood security & crime prevention (*guardias*)
- Communicate educational & political campaigns
- Health campaigns
- Neighborhood aesthetics
- Meetings



## Declining or loss of influence & prominence

- Much smaller role & importance
- Still involved in community mobilization & serve as a political information network
- Demand less unconditionality



# Government Officials



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## *Expedientes escolares y laborales*

- Academic & labor files
- Reportedly record politically suspect behavior, including actions & statements
- Must have an acceptable record to advance to a new position (in the state sector) or school
- Reportedly used by state security & others to track anti-government & political views of individuals or family members

**Other government officials, such as migration & housing authorities**