



# July 2021 Protests



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

***“What happened on July 11 was the sort of mass, island-wide protest that is the Cuban regime's worst nightmare”***

## Overview

- July 11 (& subsequent days)
- Thousands of participants (largest since 1994)
- At least 48 locations, including Havana (most widespread since 1959)
- Convened on & spread via social media
- One death & some injuries

# July 2021 Protests



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## Causes

- Economic crisis
- Shortages of medicine
- High prices & shortages of food
- Power outages
- COVID-19 surge & the state response
- Political rights or political change





# July 2021 Protests



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## Largely peaceful

### Some protesters did engage in potentially violent activities

- Throwing rocks or paving slabs (at police)
- Overturning police cars

### Use of state media to mischaracterize them as violent overall

- Broadcast select footage of violent incidents
- Alleged that protesters vandalized homes, set fires, damaged power lines, attacked police & civilians with knives and other objects, etc.



# July 2021 Protests: State Response



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

**Scaled-up its mechanisms of repression & control, along with new tactics**

**Called on Cubans to defend the revolution in the streets**

**Detained & criminalized nearly all those found to be protesting**

- Punishment
- Deter potential protesters & protests
- Show that future protests would not be tolerated



# July 2021 Protests: State Response



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

**Denied that human rights violations were committed**

**Blamed “delinquents,” the United States, & the U.S. embargo**

**Eventually, some acceptance & reforms**

- Accepted some blame for the economic situation & indicated that some protesters had legitimate concerns
- Lifted customs restrictions for travelers bringing in food & medicine

**Tighter controls on social media & online expression**



# July 2021 Protests: Agents of Repression



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## MININT & MINFAR units

- *Policia Nacional Revolucionaria* (PNR)
- *Boinas Negras*
- State security officials (MININT)
- *Boinas Rojas*

## Government supporters

- *Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida*



# July 2021 Protests: Methods of Repression



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## Violent attacks by security forces

- Beatings, pepper spray, tear gas, gunfire, etc.

## Arbitrary detentions

- Over 800 people detained, including those who did not participate in protests
- Cases of incommunicado detention

## Criminalization of nearly all participants

- Charged with public disorder; resistance; contempt; incitement to commit a crime; damages, etc.



# July 2021 Protests: Methods of Repression



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

**Physical surveillance**

**Formal & de facto house arrest**

**Violations of due process**

**Fines**

**Denial & disruption of internet access**





# Religion



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## **Historical state suppression of religious activity & belief**

- Officially atheist until 1992
- Discrimination against religious believers

## **Religious freedoms have expanded in the past two decades**

- Catholic = 60% of the population
- Growth of Evangelical worship
- African syncretic groups & practices



# Religion



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## **PCC's Office of Religious Affairs (ORA)**

- Enlists the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) & security forces to control religious practices & institutions
  - Religious groups must apply for registration with MOJ
  - If granted, must request permission from ORA for activities other than regular services
  - Decisions & bureaucratic practices - often lengthy, arbitrary, discriminatory, etc.

## **Routine & systematic violations of religious freedom & belief**

- Mainly against Christians, but also against religious minorities



# Religion



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## Religious leaders & defenders of religious freedom

- Harassment; arbitrary detentions; criminalization; arbitrary summonses; threats; intimidation; blocking access to religious services; surveillance; domestic & international travel restrictions; fines; job loss, etc.
- Members may also face harm

## Surveillance & infiltration

- Planting of informants = systematic
- Leads to self-censorship



# Religion



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## **Illegal to hold religious activities in buildings not dedicated for religious use**

- ORA approval needed for new designations & renovation/construction of existing facilities
- Construction of new churches is reportedly prohibited

## **Many Cubans' place of worship = private residence (i.e. house churches)**

- Restrictive & complicated requirements
- Unregistered = treatment varies



# Religion



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

**Religious discrimination in schools = common**

**Treatment of religious education initiatives = varies**

## Jehovah's Witnesses

- Historically – *“active religious enemies of the revolution”*
- Beliefs prohibit political involvement



# Foreign Medical Missions Program



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## ***“labor export programs with strong indications of forced labor”***

- Force or coerce individuals to participate & remain in government labor export programs

## **Over 400,000 health workers since 1963**

- Currently, 30,000 to 50,000 in more than 60 countries

**Primary source of state income = \$6 to \$8 billion per year**

**Managed by the *Unidad Central de Cooperación Medica* (UCCM), the Ministry of Health,  
& the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment**



# Foreign Medical Missions Program



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## Poor living & working conditions

## Coercive practices to prevent defections

- Withhold passports & medical credentials; restrict movement; surveillance, etc.
- Threats against participants & family members
  - retaliation; revoke medical licenses; criminalization; exile; family separation, etc.

## Defectors

- Punishment = 3 to 8 years in prison
- May be barred from returning to Cuba



# LGBTI



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## Historic repression & discrimination (1960s & 1970s)

- Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP) (Nov. 1965 -1968)

## Advances in LGBTI rights in recent years

- Mariela Castro Espin & CENESEX

## Potential harm

- Allegations of discrimination & incidents of violence
- Human rights defenders



# Afro-Cubans



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## Systemic racism

- Government has historically denied that racism exists in Cuba
- Economic marginalization & poverty
- Employment discrimination & inequalities
- Racial profiling & police violence
- Widespread racial discrimination
- Underrepresentation in high-ranking government positions

## Intersectionality of harm

- Treatment of human rights defenders



# Women



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## Gender-based discrimination & stereotypes (in employment)

### Violence against women

- No official figures or up-to-date statistics
- Some cases reported in the media & by civil society groups (including femicides)
- Presence of myths or views that perpetuate or sustain violence against women
- Over 22% of women have been victims of violence (mainly psychological)
- Absence of protection mechanisms
  - No specialized institutions or shelters, revictimization during complaints, etc.



# Pressure to Vote



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

## Voting is not obligatory

### Historic allegations of pressure to vote by state & PCC officials & civilians

- get out the vote campaigns; excess polling stations; keep track of who has/has not voted; home visits to remind or ask people why they have not voted; take ballots to individuals' homes, etc.

### 2019 Constitutional Referendum

- Public campaign to vote “Yes,” with some allegations of implicit or explicit pressure or threats
- Some allegations of repression of certain advocates campaigning for “No” or a boycott
- Allegations of certain people prevented from going to vote
- Over 2.1 million people voted “No” or did not vote



# Playing Loud Music



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

***“Music of all types — salsa, reggaeton, pop — blares at top volume at all hours of the day”***

## **Nine days of national mourning for Fidel Castro’s death (Nov. 25, 2016)**

- Ban on playing live or recorded music
  - Havana = “notable lack of amplified music”
- Allegations from dissidents of warnings & threats from security forces
  - Including to jail individuals playing or listening to music in public or at home