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*Cuba in Perspective*

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*Satellite picture of Isla de la Juventud*

© NASA

revolt for independence from colonial Spain.<sup>8</sup>

## Geographic Divisions

The Cuban nation is an archipelago (chain of islands) that contains more than 1,600 islands. Cuba is also the name of the largest island in the archipelago. It covers approximately 95% of the nation's landmass. Isla de la Juventud is the next largest island. It covers 2,238 sq km (864 sq mi), or 2% of the nation's landmass. The remaining islands are smaller rock atolls that are mostly uninhabited.<sup>9,</sup>

<sup>10</sup>

Sixty percent of the island of Cuba consists of gently rolling plains and flatlands.<sup>11</sup> A series of

lowlands and swamplands are located within these plains. The plain with its lowlands and swamplands extends onto the Zapata Peninsula bordering the Bay of Pigs.<sup>12</sup>

Approximately 25% of Cuba is mountains. The most mountainous regions are the extreme south, east, and south-central. The largest mountain range is the Sierra Maestra. It is located on the eastern part of the island. This mountain range is 249 km (159mi) and contains Pico Turquino, the country's highest peak.<sup>13, 14</sup> The Baracoa massif is part of the Sierra de Cristal range and is located on the very eastern end of Cuba. It is separated from the Sierra Maestra by a narrow valley. This valley is the main transportation corridor connecting the agricultural towns in this region.<sup>15</sup>

Central Cuba is home to the Sierra de Trinidad mountain range, which rarely rises above 1,220 (4,000 ft).<sup>16</sup> The western most region of Cuba contains the Cordillera de Guaniguanico. It consists of two mountain ranges: the Sierra de Rosario and the Sierra de los Órganos. The highest peak in this range rises to just 900 m (3,000 ft), while the peaks in the Sierra de los Órganos only rise to about 760 m (2,500 ft).<sup>17, 18</sup>

Cuba's mountains are mainly composed of limestone. Cuba's mountains contain numerous caves formed by soft limestone rock that was dissolved by groundwater running through a series of underground channels. The Cotilla Caverns near Havana are a popular destination for tourists.<sup>19</sup> The military uses some of the largest caverns in the mountains to store arms and materials.<sup>20</sup>

Cuba's irregular coastline is rocky with many coral reefs, sandy beaches, and steep cliffs.<sup>21, 22</sup> Cuba's north shore is the most rugged with cliffs dropping 30 m (100 ft) into the sea. In contrast, the southern coast contains lowland swamps, except along the very southern edge.<sup>23</sup> Wetlands make up about 4% of the country. The largest wetland is the



*Children playing in the rain, Havana*  
© Udo Springfield

Zapata Swamp in southern Matanzas province.<sup>24</sup> Red and black mangrove forests are located here. Both red and black mangroves are indigenous to Cuba.<sup>25</sup>

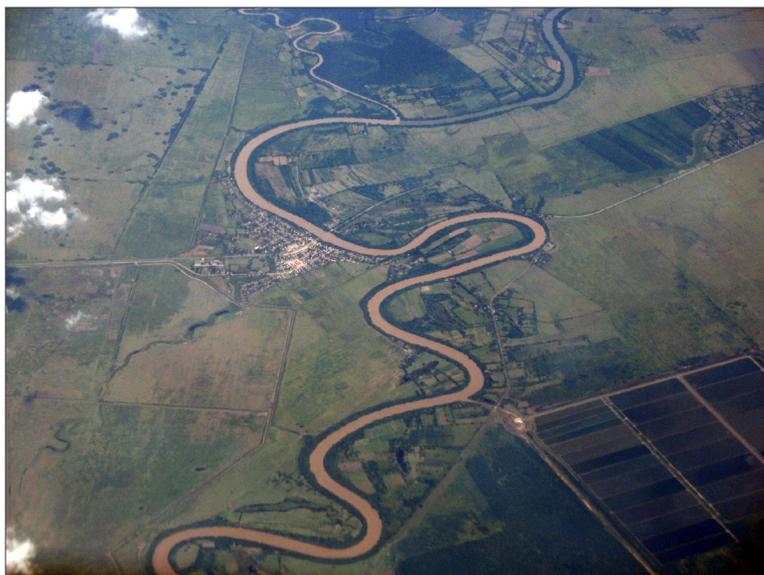
## Climate

Cuba has a moderate subtropical climate with two distinct seasons, produced by northeast trade winds.<sup>26</sup> The country's dry season lasts from November to April, and the wet season runs from May through October.<sup>27</sup> Rainfall measures approximately 1,320 mm (52 in) each year.<sup>28</sup> Most rainfall (1,060 mm/ 42 in) occurs during the summer months. The eastern mountains are the wettest part of the country.<sup>29</sup>

Temperatures vary only slightly throughout the year. The average annual temperature is approximately 26°C (79°F). August is the hottest month of the year, with average temperatures around 28°C (82°F). January is the coolest month of the year, with average temperatures around 23°C (73°F).<sup>30</sup>

Cuba experiences more tropical storms than any other Caribbean island.<sup>31</sup> The country is hit by a hurricane approximately every two years. Hurricane season officially runs from June through November, while storm season occurs

between September and October. Storm winds can reach over 257 kph (100mph), and be accompanied by 300 mm (12 in) of rain within a 24 hour period.<sup>32, 33</sup> Hurricanes Ike, Paloma, and Gustav occurred in 2008 and were the most severe to rip through the country in recent times. These three storms caused billions in material damage.<sup>34, 35</sup>



*Birdseye view of Cuato River*  
 © Courtesy of Wikipedia.org

## Rivers/Bodies of Water

Cuba has approximately 600 rivers and streams. Most are short and unnavigable.<sup>36, 37</sup> The longest rivers are in the southeast. Cauto River is the longest at 370k (230 mi) long. It flows west from the Sierra Maestra mountains, through the swamps of the Gulf of Guacanayabo. The Cauto River is mostly shallow and is only navigable by small boats for about 113 km (70 mi).<sup>38</sup>

The nation's second-longest river is the Zaza in central Cuba. The Zaza flows south, with banks that are the least forested in Cuba. Consequently, the Zaza is the site of a major reforestation project that is the most robust in the Sancti Spiritus

province. These reforestation efforts are designed to improve the region's ecosystem.<sup>39</sup>

Another south-flowing river is the Sagua la Grande. The river is navigable upstream to its mouth. The Sagua la Grande river empties into the ocean port city of the same name.<sup>40</sup>

Cuba's lakes are also generally small. The Laguna de la Leche is the country's largest lake. It covers some 67 sq km (26 sq mi), and contains brackish water because of its shallow depth. The milky-colored lake is located near the northern coast. Laguna de la Leche is essentially a lagoon that is connected to the Atlantic Ocean by a series of channels.<sup>41, 42, 43</sup>

## Major Cities

<i>City</i>	<i>Population 201044</i>
Havana	2,135,498
Santiago de Cuba	425, 851
Camagüey	305,845
Holguín	277, 050
Guantánamo	207, 857
Santa Clara	205,812



*View of Havana*  
© Vgenecr / Wikipedia.org

## *Havana*

Havana (La Habana) is the capital of Cuba. Havana is Cuba's largest city and is home to nearly 19% of the national population.<sup>45</sup> It is the center for business, government, education, culture and tourism.<sup>46</sup> Havana was established in 1514 on the nation's southern coast. The city moved to its modern-day location in the east in 1519, near the mouth of Havana harbor. The city became the capital of the Spanish colony in 1607, and was the region's largest port by the 16th century.<sup>47</sup> In the 18th century Havana was the New World's largest dockyard and shipbuilding center.<sup>48</sup>

Havana was under British control for eleven months in 1762, during England's Seven Years' War. England eventually traded Havana for Florida. This trade enabled Havana to grow and develop over the next 200 years. Havana was surprisingly untouched by Cuba's wars of independence. Consequently, it is one of the finest surviving Spanish colonial cities in the world. It is also a UNESCO world heritage site.<sup>49</sup> The government lacked funds to maintain the city following the revolution in 1959. The lack of maintenance resulted in the deterioration of many historic buildings. The government recently implemented reconstruction programs to restore the city to its previous glory.<sup>50, 51</sup>



*View of Santiago de Cuba*  
© Alex Cano

## *Santiago de Cuba*

Santiago de Cuba was founded by Diego Velásquez in 1514. Santiago de Cuba was the starting point for many of Spain's expeditions to the new world.<sup>52, 53</sup> Santiago de Cuba was overrun by the French in 1553, and again by the British in 1662.<sup>54</sup> French immigrants came to the city in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, following Haiti's slave rebellion. The city is most famously known as the place where U.S forces defeated Spain at the battle of San Juan Hill in 1898.<sup>55</sup>

Santiago de Cuba was also the home of Frank Pais. He was one of Cuba's revolutionary heroes in the 1950s. It was here that Pais formed his urban resistance groups. These groups eventually cemented Castro's 1959 overthrow of the Batista government. Castro announced revolutionary victory over the Batista government in Santiago de Cuba.<sup>56</sup>

The modern city of Santiago de Cuba is the island nation's second-largest city, and it rests a valley near a bay on the Caribbean coast. This is an important agricultural area, as well as an mining center for copper, iron, and manganese. The city is also home to the University of the Oriente, a medical school, and various tourism sites and museums. It is home to Cuba's largest community with African roots.<sup>57</sup>



*View of Camagüey*  
© Danleo / Wikipedia.org

## Camagüey

Camagüey is the nation's third-largest city. It sits on the San Pedro River in east-central Cuba. The city was founded in 1514 near the present-day city of Nuevitas in 1528. Camagüey was moved inland from its original location near Nuevitas.<sup>58</sup> In its early years, the city was the site of battles against pirates. Its labyrinthine street layout was allegedly constructed as a defense against pillaging pirates and other invaders.<sup>59</sup>

Camagüey is located 570 km (354 mi) from Havana. The city is a major livestock and sugarcane production center. It is the largest interior city in the country. It has developed into a major communications, trading, and industrial center and is home to a branch campus of the University of Havana. It also home to a thermal power plant and an international airport, and is a stronghold for the Catholic Church.<sup>60, 61</sup>



*Street in Holguín*  
© Anton Xelenov

## Holguín

Holguín was founded in 1523. It is known as the “city of parks,” and is the place where Christopher Columbus first disembarked in 1492.<sup>62, 63, 64, 65</sup> In the mid-19 century, the city's residents were increasingly dissatisfied with their British colonial rulers. As a result, a group of patriots organized a series of actions to remove them. This initiated the revolutionary movement called the Ten Years' War of 1868. Many *holguíneros*, as the city's residents are known, participated in various revolutionary actions. One of these actions was the formation of the first communist party cell in the nation.<sup>66</sup>

Today, the city is widely acknowledged as the center of Cuba's entertainment industry.<sup>67</sup> Holguín hosts Cuba's national ballet, numerous music venues. It is also the production center for the nation's four leading beers.<sup>68</sup> It is home to a major dive center and to the world's second-largest deposits of nickel and cobalt.<sup>69</sup>



*Street view in Guantánamo*  
© Leon Petrosyan

### *Guantánamo*

Guantánamo literally translates into “land among rivers.” It is Cuba’s fifth-largest city and it is the capital of Guantánamo province.<sup>70,71</sup> The city was founded in 1920 by Catalan and French settlers. The French mostly came from Haiti. They were quick to establish coffee plantations, cocoa, and fruit orchards in this mountainous region.<sup>72</sup> Today it remains a major coffee and sugar cane region.<sup>73</sup> The Cuchillas de Toa Biosphere Reserve (RBCT) is located slightly inland from Guantánamo. This is one of the world’s last primal rainforests, and it is listed as a UNESCO World Natural Heritage site.<sup>74</sup> The U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay is located near this city. Tensions can and do arise between U.S. military personnel and local residents.<sup>75,76</sup>

### *Santa Clara*

The city of Santa Clara was founded in 1869 and is the capital of Villa Clara province. Santa Clara is located in central Cuba on the indigenous Indian settlement of Cubanacán. Columbus first arrived in this city assuming it was the headquarters of Kublai Khan. His incorrect assumption was based on his belief that he had reached the far east.<sup>77</sup>

The city played an important role in the Cuban revolution. It is deeply identified with the Cuban revolutionary hero Ché Guevara.<sup>78</sup> The city of Santa Clara is the site of the only major military battle of the revolution. This battle resulted in Guevara and 300 of his guerilla fighters capturing Santa Clara. This signaled the end of Batista’s regime and paved the way for Castro’s rise to power.<sup>79</sup>

Today the city is a home to a major Steel company. The Central University of Las Villas, founded in 1952,

is also located here and is the most prestigious university outside of the capital. The city is strategically located close to the exact geographic center of the island. It is also a junction point for most of the country's main rail lines.<sup>80,81</sup>



*Air Pollution*  
© Timo / flickr.com

## Environmental Concerns

Cuba faces a series of environmental challenges, including air and water pollution, loss of biodiversity, and deforestation.<sup>82,83</sup> The emission of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen from local industries have significantly degraded air quality. Industrial emissions have also produced acid rain in the eastern provinces.<sup>84</sup> Water pollution is also on the rise. Approximately 82% of untreated urban sewage is dropped directly into Cuban's water system. Old and poorly maintained sanitation infrastructure cannot handle capacity, so untreated water is pumped directly into the Caribbean from Havana.<sup>85</sup> The antiquated water distribution system leads to a loss of nearly 70% of potable drinking water. This places an enormous strain on resources.<sup>86</sup>

Soil is also increasingly saline. Crop yields have been reduced by nearly 70% in some areas due to increased salt content. Soil erosion affects nearly 60% of the nation, leading to worries about encroaching desertification.<sup>87</sup>

Cuba is the most biodiverse nation in the Caribbean. Yet, Cuba's biodiversity is being threatened. Nearly 48% of the flora and 30% of the fauna in Cuba is endangered.<sup>88,89</sup> Most of this threat comes from the expansion of farming, which has destroyed local habitat. Other habitat loss is due to pollution from Cuba's industrial development and expanding tourism industry.<sup>90</sup>



*Flood in Havana*  
© Jane Challinor

## Natural Hazards

Cuba faces challenges from a number of natural hazards. Tsunamis and earthquakes are occasional problems, although the last major incidents took place in 1992.<sup>91</sup> Landslides are also a potential problem, occurring mainly in the mountainous regions. Holguín, Granma, Santiago and Guantánamo are the areas most at risk from these hazards.<sup>92,93</sup> Frequent tropical storms and hurricanes are a substantial concern. Such storms can pound the country and trigger landslides. Cuba's east coast is especially vulnerable to hurricanes, mostly from August to November.<sup>94</sup> The east coast includes the cities of Havana, Nuevitas, Baracoa, and Manzanillo as well as La Isla de Juventud.<sup>95</sup>

Cuba is also vulnerable to droughts.<sup>96</sup> In 2011, the country faced its worst drought in over 50 years after three years of below normal rainfall. The government was forced to deliver water to people in Havana during this drought, since Havana was the most seriously affected area.<sup>97,98</sup> Drought affected nearly 20% of the nation in 2013.<sup>99</sup> Drought stresses the agriculture and livestock industries. Drought also necessitates the implementation of water restrictions, impacting the people living in cities that rely on reservoirs for their water supply.<sup>100</sup> The central regions and coastal cities of the country suffered severe flooding in May 2012 when rainfall returned to the island.<sup>101,102</sup>

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## Overview: Chapter 1 Assessment

1. Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean.

**TRUE**

Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean and is only slightly smaller than the state of Pennsylvania.

2. Most of Cuba is mountainous.

**FALSE**

Sixty percent of Cuba's land consists of gently rolling plains and flatlands. Approximately 25% of the nation is comprised of mountains.

3. Cuba's rainy season lasts from May through October.

**TRUE**

Cuba has a moderate subtropical climate with two distinct seasons, produced by northeast trade winds. The country's dry season lasts from November to April, and the wet season runs from May through October.

4. Approximately one in three Cubans lives in the capital city Havana.

**FALSE**

Havana (La Habana) is the capital of Cuba. Havana is Cuba's largest city, yet is home to just 19% of the national population.

5. A complex of caves exists in the mountains of Cuba.

**TRUE**

Cuba's mountains contain a series of limestone caves. The military uses some of the largest caves in the mountains to store arms and materials.



*Cuban flag*  
© Ivaylo Getov

## Chapter 2: History

### Introduction

**T**he Cuban nation has assumed international importance from its earliest days. It is strategically located along the major sea routes in the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, and the Gulf of Mexico. It has therefore been a major port and gateway between Europe and the Americas.<sup>1</sup> Spain fought a series of costly wars to try to keep control of the island. However, Cuba came under control of the United States as part of the 1898 peace treaty following the Spanish-American War. Cuba finally gained full independence in 1902.<sup>2,3</sup>

Cuba has a history of being ruled by incompetent and corrupt presidents. Life for the poor became increasingly difficult as power and wealth continued to concentrate in the hands of a few. A group of guerilla fighters led by Fidel Castro responded to this situation by launching an armed attack against the government. The rebels were defeated in their first attempts. The guerillas eventually succeeded and triumphantly

marched into Havana in 1959 to set up a new government.<sup>4, 5, 6</sup>

Castro's policies focused on improving the living conditions for the poor. However, many of his economic policies angered the United States. The United States responded by cutting diplomatic ties with Cuba, and has not had formal diplomatic relations with Cuba since 1961.<sup>7, 8, 9</sup> Cuba then went on to enjoy a close alliance with the former Soviet Union. This alliance ended after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, wreaking havoc on the Cuban economy.<sup>10</sup> Cuba eventually rebounded and continues to provide massive state services to its people. Cubans enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world, despite low wages.<sup>11, 12</sup>

Fidel Castro stepped down in 2008 and was replaced by his brother, Raúl. The new president, Raúl Castro remains committed to Fidel's socialist principles. He also recognizes the need to change an inefficient economic system that can no longer afford to subsidize services. New economic reforms have been introduced that encourage private industry and inspire entrepreneurship. Raúl Castro was reelected in 2013, and he announced he will retire in 2018. This opens the door to uncertainty, as well as possibility.<sup>13, 14, 15</sup>



*Reconstruction of a Taino village*  
© Michal Zalewski

## Earliest Cuba

Cuba's first inhabitants arrived sometime between 3500 and 2000 B.C.E., yet little is actually known about these early inhabitants. Scholars essentially agree that they were composed of nomadic groups who traveled the Caribbean in canoes, settling first on one island before moving to another. Two subgroups who settled in Cuba are identified as Arawak from South America. The first subgroup of Arawak is the Guanahatabey, who they settled in the west. The second Arawak subgroup is the Ciboney, who they settled in the east.<sup>16, 17</sup>

The Taino is another Arawak subgroup. They moved to Cuba's east side between 1200 and 1250 C.E. They arrived in Cuba after fleeing the modern-day islands of Puerto Rico and Hispaniola. The Taino were relatively advanced agriculturalists. They lived peacefully in villages of about 3,000 inhabitants. Their material culture was well-developed and included tools, pottery, and religious symbols.<sup>18, 19</sup> Their peaceful life ended in 1492 shortly after a Spanish sailing vessel landed on the island.<sup>20</sup>



*Painting of Christopher Columbus*  
© Sebastiano del Piombo

## The Spanish Colonial Period

### *Early Colonial Period (1492-1800)*

Christopher Columbus landed on Cuba's northern coast in October 1492, claiming the island for Spain.<sup>21</sup> Columbus returned to Spain, but came back to Cuba the following year and spent three months exploring the island for silver, gold, and other island riches. Columbus again returned to the islands in 1503 for his fourth and last visit.<sup>22</sup>

Cuba's first permanent settlement was Baracoa. It was established in 1511 by Spaniard Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar, a wealthy landowner from the nearby island of Hispaniola. The Spanish had divided the island into seven divisions in less than a decade, each with its own local government.<sup>23</sup> Santiago de Cuba became the colonial capital in 1515.<sup>24</sup>

Spain's primary interest in Cuba lay in the prospects of finding gold and silver. Spain was discouraged by the limited gold deposits in Cuba, and so it was

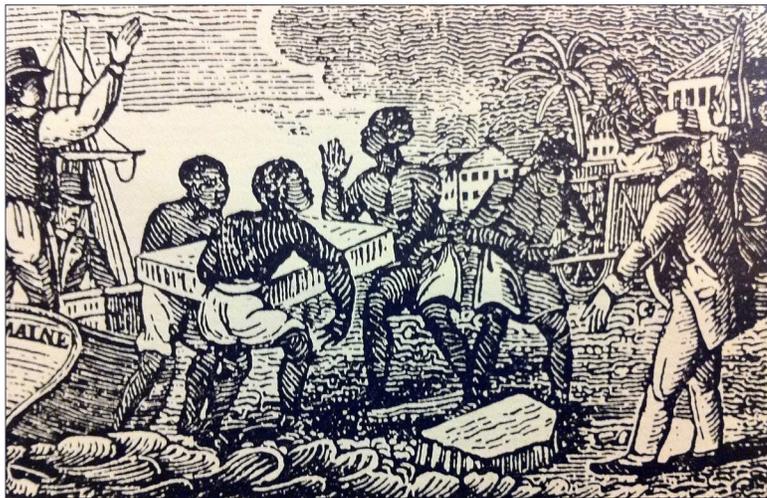
ignored for some time. Eventually, Spain needed a place from which it could launch expeditions to other potentially more lucrative parts of the New World.<sup>25, 26</sup> Spain selected Cuba for this purpose, establishing its importance as a port.

The Spanish established a feudal system concentrating land ownership in the hands of a few wealthy individuals.<sup>27</sup> They created the *encomienda* system forcing the indigenous Taino to work the plantations and pay tribute in exchange for protection.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, by 1550 the native population was virtually destroyed by disease, maltreatment, and migration. African slaves were subsequently brought in to replace the dwindling Taino.<sup>29, 30, 31</sup>

Cuba became increasingly popular as a stopover for ships sailing to and from Spain. Havana developed into a major port city and became home to more than half of Cuba's population. The Spanish fortified the region to protect against marauding pirates and unfriendly warships.<sup>32, 33, 34</sup>

Britain allied itself with France against Spain in 1756, during the Seven Years' War. The British captured Havana in 1762 and occupied the city for only eleven months. Cuba then established trade relations with the British's American colonies. This relationship

greatly increased the number of ships visiting Cuba. Britain returned Havana to the Spanish at the end of the Seven Years' War in exchange for Florida. By 1765, Cuba had become a major trading power.<sup>35</sup>



*Depiction of slaves in Cuba*  
© Samuel Griswold Goodrich

### *The Road to Independence (1800-1899)*

Events in the first quarter of the 19th century ended Cuba's relative calm. The Spanish feudal system had created a highly unequal society with rampant poverty. Dissatisfaction was increasing among the poor.

Cuba also experienced an influx of French who were escaping Haiti after the slave revolt in 1801. The sale of Louisiana to the United States a few years later brought even more Europeans to Cuba. By 1825, all of Spain's New World colonies, except Puerto Rico and Cuba had gained their independence.<sup>36, 37</sup>

The sugar industry prospered during these years.

This increased the need for more slaves to work the plantations, which coincided with rebellions mounted by African slaves against their treatment. Chinese indentured servants were subsequently traded to replace African slaves on sugar plantations.

The divisions between the Spanish-born population (*peninsulares*) and the Cuban-born Spanish (*criollos*) also became even sharper during this period. The *peninsulares* tended to be wealthy landowners who occupied powerful positions in government and the military. The *criollos*, on the other hand, were teachers, writers, and other professionals.<sup>38, 39, 40</sup>

Discontent continued to grow, fanning the flames of wide-spread rebellion. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes led a rebel uprising in 1868, demanding freedom for the slaves and independence from Spain. The first war for independence (also known as the Ten Years' War) ended with rebel defeat, the loss of 200,000 lives and the devastation of eastern Cuba. Spain granted limited powers to Cuba but real power remained concentrated in the hands of the *peninsulares*.<sup>41, 42</sup>

The uneasy peace lasted only 17 years before José Martí organized another rebellion from his exile in New York. Martí's revolutionary forces landed in Cuba in 1895 and marched west towards Havana. The Spanish response was ruthless. The United States sent the battleship USS Maine to Havana in 1898 to protect U.S. citizens living in Cuba. The ship was blown up in the harbor, marking the beginning of the Spanish-American war. The United States defeated Spain within six months and gained control of Cuba and Puerto Rico. The Treaty of Paris was signed between the United States and Spain in

1898. This treaty formally granted Cuba independence from Spain. The U.S. assumed control of the island on 1 January 1899.<sup>43, 44</sup>

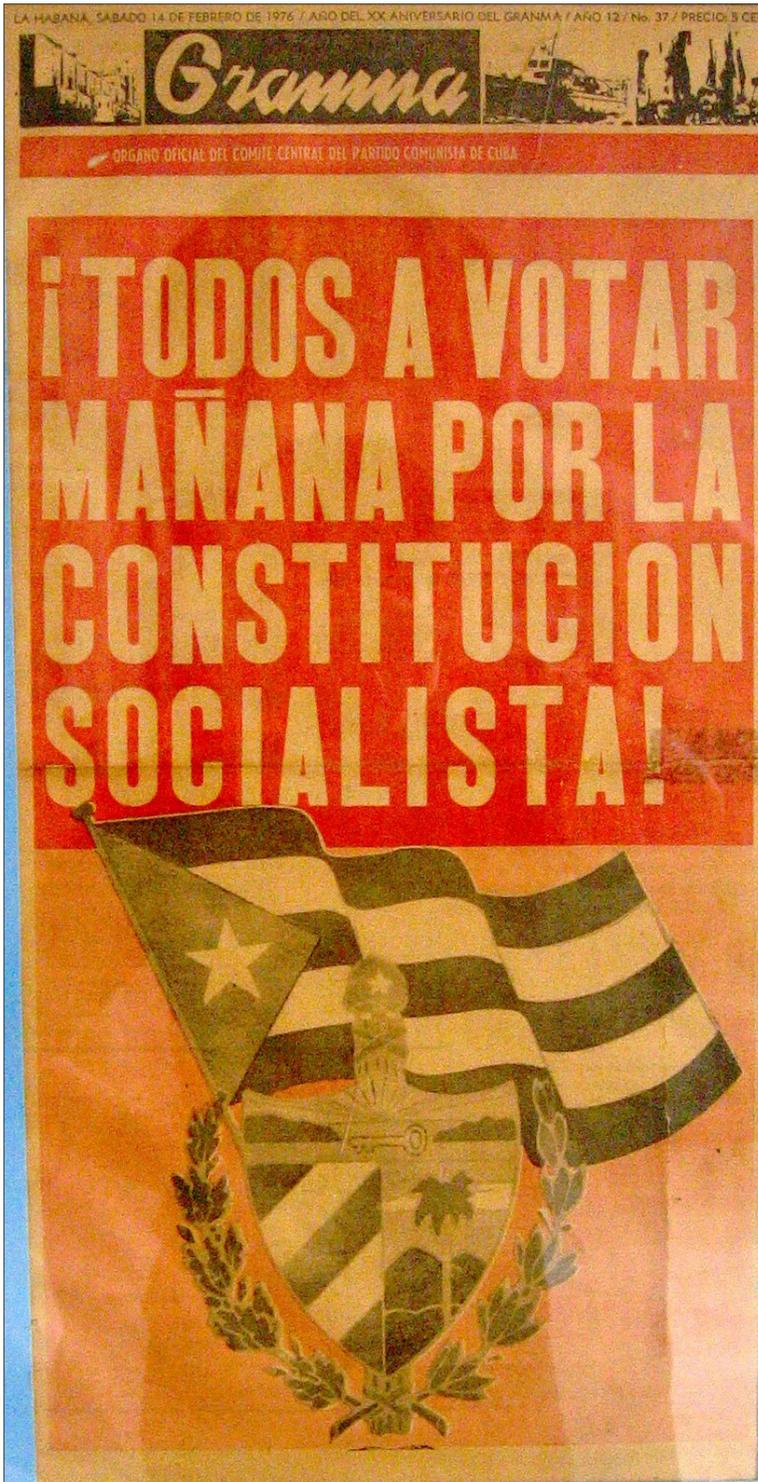
## Republic of Cuba (1902-1959)

### *The Early Years*

Cuban rebel groups disbanded under the authority of the U.S. governor, but the *peninsulares* remained in their government positions. Cubans drafted a new constitution in late 1900, which granted Cuba its independence. The Platt Amendment, however, allowed the United States to retain partial control over Cuban affairs. This included a right to lease land in order to build a permanent naval base at Guantanamo. This amendment stipulated that the land lease could not be unilaterally cancelled by either country.<sup>45, 46</sup>

Cuba officially gained its independence on 20 May 1902. Cubans elected their first president, Tomás Estrada Palma, who was quickly embroiled in the conflict between the Liberal and Conservative parties. Estrada Palma responded by aligning himself with the Conservatives. Liberals were incensed by his decision, and quickly mounted an armed rebellion. This initiated the second Cuban occupation by U.S. troops and by 1934, Cuba had suffered through four corrupt and ineffective presidencies.<sup>47, 48</sup>

Gerardo Machado y Morales (1925-1933) was one of Cuba's worst, and most notorious presidents.<sup>49</sup> Machado had little formal education, yet he managed to attain the rank of general during the second war of independence. He joined the Liberal party and held several political offices before becoming president.<sup>50, 51</sup> Machado's first years were filled with optimism. He fiercely defended Cuba's sovereignty, built national infrastructure, and promoted economic investment. Yet, complaints about his dictatorial tendencies began to circulate in 1928. This created opposition to his presidency,



Poster encouraging citizens to vote  
© Philippe Antoine

which continued to increase. Machado responded with brute force. Revolutionaries led an anti-government revolt in 1931. The secret police responded with a campaign of terror and Machado adamantly proclaimed he would never leave office before his term ended.<sup>52, 53</sup> The situation grew so serious that President Roosevelt sent an ambassador who tried, unsuccessfully, to reason with Machado.<sup>54</sup>

Cuba's economy began to fail during this time. Cuba had become dependent on its sugar industry and when the world price of sugar collapsed, so did the economy. Depression swept the nation.<sup>55, 56</sup> The economic collapse combined with political opposition to make it impossible for Machado to hold on to power. He fled to Nassau in 1933, and died in Florida in 1939.<sup>57, 58</sup>



*Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar*  
© Harris & Ewing

### *The Batista Government*

Manuel de Céspedes became the interim president, but he did not serve long.<sup>59</sup> A group of noncommissioned officers took over an army base in Havana in September 1933. The uprising, dubbed “the Revolution of Sergeants,” had been organized by Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar.<sup>60</sup> The revolution quickly removed the president and replaced him with Ramón Grau San Martín. The United States refused to accept the Grau government. Batista responded by ousting Ramón Grau San Martín in January 1934, and Batista temporarily assumed the presidency. Thirty-two hours later, Carlos Mendieta was named president.<sup>61, 62</sup> Behind the scenes, Batista ran Cuba through Mendieta and three other puppet presidents. Batista won his own presidential election in 1940.<sup>63</sup>

Batista's election was well received by the Americans, despite having received support from Cuba's Communist Party. Batista was a strong defender of U.S. interests in the region.<sup>64</sup> His heavy taxation of Cubans fuelled discontent and he lost his bid to be reelected in 1944. His successor was Ramón Grau San Martín, who served two terms. Batista fled to Florida after his defeat in 1944. He returned to Cuba in 1952 to launch another rebellion. In March of that year, the coup successfully overthrew the government. Batista installed himself as dictator, suspended the constitution, and established a one-party state.<sup>65, 66</sup>

The poor continued to suffer under Batista, while the rich prospered. Wealthy Americans frequented Cuba, enjoying Cuba's entertainment scene, including dancing and gambling. During these years, Batista formed close associations with mafia personalities including Meyer Lansky and Lucky Luciano.<sup>67, 68</sup> Discontent among the poor continued to mount. In July 1953, Fidel Castro led a small band of armed rebels in an attack on a military barracks. The attack was quickly suppressed and most of the rebels were killed or captured, including Castro who was sentenced to prison. Batista

quickly set to work securing his power, and felt secure enough to release Castro from prison in 1955.<sup>69</sup> Castro fled to Mexico where he met Ché Guevara. Together they schemed to overthrow Batista, who had won another presidential election in which he was the only candidate.<sup>70, 71</sup>

## Revolutionary Cuba

### *Castro's Rise to Power*

Opposition grew against Batista. In 1956, Castro was confident it was time to return to Cuba. Castro and his revolutionary force of 80 men landed in eastern Cuba. Most were killed, but Castro and Guevara escaped to the mountains. There they organized a stronger opposition army supported by disenchanted students, the poor, and the communists.<sup>72, 73, 74</sup>

For the next two years, Castro's rebels launched a series of guerilla attacks against the government.<sup>75</sup> Batista sent 12,000 regular army soldiers to Cuba to capture the rebels, but was unsuccessful. Local support for the rebels continued to build. On New Year's Day 1959, Batista fled to the Dominican Republic and later to Portugal where he died in 1973.<sup>76, 77</sup> Castro and his victorious forces marched into the capital a week later. The 32-year old Castro was hailed as a hero by ordinary Cubans. The illegitimate son of a farmer became a symbol of hope for the lower classes.<sup>78</sup> A new government was installed with José Miro Cardona as the prime minister and Manuel Urrutia as president. The United States was quick to recognize the new government.<sup>79, 80</sup>



*Fidel Castro*  
© Ricardo Stuckert

The real power in the government, however, resided in Castro. Miro resigned in February and Castro replaced him.<sup>81</sup> Castro was not a communist when he came to power. He was a man on a mission to create greater equality, remove the power and privilege of the wealthy, and to assure the nation's independence from foreign powers.<sup>82</sup> He worked to reduce the nation's dependence on sugar, to diversify the economy, and expand trade relations.<sup>83</sup> Cuba gradually formed closer ties with the Soviet Union and

built trade relations with them. At the same time, Castro's government began to extend social services, such as hospitals and schools to the poor. He nationalized private property and business, including those of the United States and Great Britain. The United States response was to cut diplomatic ties in 1961, ban travel to the country, and impose a trade embargo.<sup>84, 85</sup>



*Che Guevara and Fidel Castro*  
© Alberto Korda

### *Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis*

The United States became increasingly disenchanted with Castro, especially as Cuba formed stronger ties with the Soviet Union. In 1961, Cuban exiles mounted an invasion of Cuba with support from the United States government. A 1,400-man force landed at the Bay of Pigs. Within 48 hours, 120 invaders had been killed and 1,200 had been captured.<sup>86</sup> The failed attempt left deep scars between the two nations. It cemented Castro's beliefs that the United States intended to overthrow or assassinate him.<sup>87</sup>

Tensions between the two nations continued to sour. Cuba feared a U.S. invasion and petitioned the Soviet Union for protection in 1962. The Soviets built a number of secret military bases in Cuba and installed nuclear armed missiles aimed at the United States. President Kennedy learned of the missiles and decided to blockade Cuba to stop more Soviet supplies from entering Cuba.<sup>88, 89</sup>

For six tense days the world feared it was on the brink of nuclear war. The Soviets announced it would remove its missiles in exchange for a promise from the United States that it would not invade Cuba. That ended the immediate crisis, but it heightened tensions among all three countries.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>91</sup>

### *Post-Revolutionary Cuba (1962-2008)*

Castro continued his attacks on private enterprise and the economy worsened. Government support waned and thousands of dissidents were jailed. Castro disbanded labor unions and took over the media.<sup>92, 93</sup>

The economy was improving by the 1970s, because of Soviet financial assistance. Castro became the president of the Council of Ministers and the Council of State under the



*Hugo Chávez*  
© Premier.gov.ru

new 1976 constitution.<sup>94</sup> The government provided more social services and life became better for ordinary Cubans.<sup>95, 96, 97</sup> Public protests erupted once again in 1980. Cuba responded by allowing 125,000 people leave the country. Most traveled to Miami as part of the Mariel Boatlift.<sup>98, 99</sup>

The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union dealt a major blow to Cuba's economy. This forced Castro to impose food rationing, cut energy use, and reduce public services.<sup>100</sup> The economy continued to worsen until 1994, when a few of the restrictions on private property were lifted. Tourists once again returned to the island and provided much needed hard currency.<sup>101, 102</sup>

Castro's health began to fail in the 1990s. He underwent gastrointestinal surgery in 2006, and temporarily handed the reins of power to his brother, Raúl.<sup>103</sup> Fidel Castro remained outside the public eye after his surgery and made only occasional public appearances.<sup>104</sup>

Castro forged a critical alliance in 2007 with Venezuela's then-president, Hugo Chávez. Together the two helped form the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. This served as a counterweight to the Free Trade Area of the Americas.<sup>105</sup> They also agreed on important trade agreements. These agreements stated that Venezuela would supply heavily discounted oil to

Cuba, and that in exchange, Cuba would send much needed doctors to Venezuela.<sup>106, 107</sup> Those arrangements helped secure the stability and influence of both countries in Latin America.<sup>108</sup>

Cuba's national assembly elected Raúl Castro president of the nation in February 2008. However, Fidel retained his role as First Secretary of the Communist Party. Fidel stepped down as First Secretary in April 2011, and Raúl was elected to the post.<sup>109</sup> In spite of his retirement, Fidel Castro continues to be an influential and powerful player on the domestic and international scene. Fidel even met the Iranian president and Pope Benedict in April 2011.<sup>110</sup>



*Raúl Castro*  
© Government.ru

## Cuba Under Raúl Castro (2008-Present)

Some see Raúl Castro as more traditional than his brother, yet he has also been more open to economic reform.<sup>111</sup> He has declared that he wants to make Cuba's brand of socialism "prosperous and sustainable." However, the new president knows that the high standard of living in Cuba depends on providing social services the country can no longer afford.<sup>112, 113, 114</sup>

Cuba has been heading down a new economic path since Raúl assumed office. He has reduced many of the restrictions on private ownership of property and introduced reforms promoting private industry.<sup>115</sup> The government hopes to have the private sector generate up to half of its national GDP before 2020.<sup>116</sup> He has trimmed the bloated state bureaucracy by eliminating nearly 600,000 jobs.<sup>117, 118</sup> He has also stopped partial payments to those who lost their jobs, in spite of assertions that there are no jobs in the private sector.<sup>119, 120</sup> He has also announced plans to end Cuba's dual currency system.<sup>121</sup>

Beyond economic reforms, Raúl has freed more than 100 political prisoners. The government also recently signed the UN covenants on human rights. Repression has eased and Cubans can now express their discontent with less fear than in the past.<sup>122</sup>

Nevertheless, Raúl Castro says these are updates and not reforms. He has not announced any public intention to rid Cuba of socialism.<sup>123</sup> He has proceeded cautiously with the changes and has quietly quashed any talk of increased democracy. The Communist Party is still the only legal party, and calls for free and open elections have been ignored.<sup>124</sup>

It remains unclear if Cuba will continue on its path of reforms. Raúl Castro announced in 2013 that he will step down as president in 2018. At the moment, the current vice president, Miguel Díaz-Canel, appears to be his most likely successor.<sup>125, 126</sup>

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## Overview: Chapter 2 Assessment

1. Columbus landed on Cuba and claimed it for Spain in 1492.

**TRUE**

In October 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on Cuba's northern coast, claiming the island for Spain.

2. Spain's immediate interests in Cuba lay in its rich agricultural potential.

**FALSE**

Spain's primary interest in Cuba lay in the prospects of finding gold and silver. Spain was discouraged by the limited gold deposits in Cuba, and so it was ignored for some time.

3. Cuba was one of the last of Spain's New World colonies to win independence.

**TRUE**

By 1825, all of Spain's New World colonies, except Puerto Rico and Cuba had gained their independence. Cuba officially gained its independence on 20 May 1902.

4. Juan Batista was staunchly anticommunist.

**FALSE**

The communist party strongly supported Batista's bid for the presidency in 1940.

5. The United States sent its troops to the Bay of Pigs to try to overthrow Castro in 1961.

**TRUE**

In 1961, Cuban exiles mounted an invasion of Cuba with the support of the United States government. A 1,400-man force landed at the Bay of Pigs. Within 48 hours, the invasion ended with the deaths of 120 and the capture of 1,200.



*Grocery counter  
© Mary Abq*

## Chapter 3: Economy

### Introduction

**F**idel Castro came to power in 1959 and immediately implemented a socialist economy. He also eliminated the private ownership of most property and enterprises. Cuba's economy today is still largely state-owned and centrally planned.<sup>1,2</sup> Most means of production are owned by the state and approximately 83% of the labor force is employed by the government. Another 5% work in cooperatives with close ties to the state.<sup>3</sup>

The break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a major blow to the Cuban economy. The country had grown dependent on Soviet subsidies to prop up its own economy.

The immediate effect was a 50% reduction in Cuba's Gross National Product (GNP), as well as a 79% decline in exports coupled with a 75% decline in imports. Budget deficits soared and the standard of living dropped precipitously.<sup>4</sup>

Cuba's new president, Raúl Castro, has been more open to economic changes. He created opportunities for private ownership of businesses, self-employment, and announced plans to end Cuba's dual currency system.<sup>5, 6, 7, 8</sup> However, reality has not yet matched government pledges. Private sector growth is tightly restricted, and there is limited access to credit. Other economic policies have also hampered reforms.<sup>9, 10, 11</sup>

These new economic strategies are not universally accepted. They have been somewhat unpopular among residents who claim that prices are on the rise. Many assert that 80% of their budget is spent on food.<sup>12, 13</sup> Nearly 600,000 state employees have lost their jobs as the government tries to streamline the state bureaucracy.<sup>14, 15</sup> In spite of this, the government remains cautiously optimistic as it moves away from a centrally controlled economic system. Citizen attitudes are slowly changing in favor of a more free-market economy. Only time will tell how these reforms will play out.<sup>16, 17</sup>



*Drying tobacco leaves*  
© Derek Law

## Agriculture

### *Farming*

**F**arming was once the backbone of the Cuban economy. Today it accounts for slightly less than 4% of national GDP and employs approximately 20% of the labor force.<sup>18</sup> Major crops include sugar, tobacco, citrus, coffee, rice, potatoes, and beans. Livestock is an important subsector, although production has fallen recently.<sup>19, 20</sup> Numerous agricultural reform measures have been put into place, yet the sector is still in crisis and is unable to meet even 80% of the nation's food needs.<sup>21, 22, 23</sup>

There are several kinds of farms in Cuba, including state farms, large state-owned cooperatives, smaller cooperatives formed by individual farmers, and individual farms. The government owns between 80% and 85% of all agricultural lands.<sup>24, 25</sup> About 70% to 75% is given to farmers to use, rent-free, for up to ten years so long as the land is constantly producing crops.<sup>26, 27</sup> Regardless of type, all farm producers must have a contract with the state. This contract requires farmers to deliver a set amount of produce at a specified price. In return, farmers receive seed, fertilizer, and other production needs. Farmers may sell produce surpluses above the specified contractual limits, on the open market.<sup>28</sup>

There is great potential for this sector's growth. There is also potential for this sector to make significant contributions to future GDP. However, only modest improvements have been produced from these agricultural reforms and economic changes.<sup>29, 30</sup>



*Men with fish*  
© Paul Keller

### *Forestry and Fishing*

Marine fisheries contribute the largest number of catches to the fishing subsector. Most of the catches consist of tuna, hake, and needlefish.<sup>31, 32</sup> Cuban aquaculture is a growing enterprise. It accounted for nearly 41% of production in 2006.<sup>33</sup> Freshwater fish and marine shrimp farms are important employment sources, but they remain largely supported by the state. Popular species include tilapia, carp, trout, catfish, and sea bass.<sup>34, 35</sup> Most of the fish that is produced goes to the state. Only a small portion goes to the local government. Over 80% of the people employed in the sector are from rural or suburban areas and approximately 28% of employees are female.<sup>36</sup>

Forestry is a much smaller subsector. It accounted for about 1% of GDP in 2000, and just 9% of the agriculture sector. Approximately 22% to 29% of Cuba is forested and only 29% is under production. Most wood is used for fuel or charcoal.<sup>37, 38</sup> Mahogany, ebony and granadilla offer a potentially wider wood products market.<sup>39</sup>



*Industrial area, Havana*  
© Rinaldo Wurglitsch

### Industry

Cuba's industrial sector is underdeveloped and contributes approximately 22% to national GDP. The industry sector employs roughly 17% of the labor force.<sup>40, 41</sup> Industrial output has declined for two decades, and output was only half its 1989 level in 2010.<sup>42</sup> The collapse of the Soviet Union was a major cause of this decline, though not the only one. Antiquated equipment, a lack of foreign investment, and the decline in sugar production are also implicated.<sup>43</sup>

The most important products include tobacco, processed foods and beverages along with chemicals, transport equipment, machinery.<sup>44</sup>

Cement is another main driver of industry output.<sup>45, 46, 47</sup>

The government has embarked on a series of initiatives designed to increase manufacturing. One of the most promising is an agreement with Brazil to create a free-trade manufacturing zone near Havana. Most of the financing will come from Brazil.<sup>48, 49</sup>



*Limestone caves*  
© Badly Drawn Dad / flickr.com

## Natural Resources

There are also a number of important mineral resources in Cuba, such as feldspar, gypsum, iron ore and limestone. Chief among these are nickel and cobalt, a nickel mining byproduct. Cuba's Holguín province holds most of Cuba's nickel reserves, which are the second-largest in the world.<sup>50, 51</sup> Deposits of gold, copper, and zinc have been found in the province of Villa Clara. A rich deposit of gold was recently discovered on the Isla de la Juventud. This discovery has prompted plans to build an open pit mine on the island.<sup>52</sup> Cuba also plans to mine and utilize its reserves of zeolite, a non-metallic mineral with wide potential for use in agriculture, including use as a food additive for livestock feed.<sup>53</sup>

Cuba's goal to exploit offshore oil reserves recently fell through when a Russian company abandoned its exploration efforts. The company promised to return in 2014 and continue its exploration efforts, but those plans are uncertain. Cuba is currently in negotiations with a Norwegian company to lease rigs and continue exploration in the Gulf of Mexico. Cuba estimates that it may have up to 20 billion bbl of oil reserves. More conservative estimates place that number at around 4.6 billion bbl.<sup>54</sup> Cuba has announced plans to drill land wells and temporarily discontinue offshore exploration. New horizontal wells drilled from land to crude deposits only a few miles off the coast are underway.<sup>55</sup>



*Sugar cane press*  
© Ian McBurnie

## Trade

Cuba maintains a significant trade deficit with the rest of the world, with imports far exceeding exports.<sup>56</sup> Its main export products include petroleum, nickel, medical products, sugar, tobacco, fish, citrus, and fish.<sup>57, 58, 59</sup> Services constitute the largest proportion (65%) of exports, mainly doctors dispatched to Venezuela.<sup>60, 61</sup> Imports include petroleum, food, machinery, and chemicals.<sup>62, 63, 64</sup>

In the 1950s, Cuba's foreign trade with the United States constituted more than two-thirds of its total trade.<sup>65</sup> Trade with the United States ceased after Castro's overthrow of the Cuban government in 1959. The United States' response was to impose a full embargo on Cuba.<sup>66</sup> By the 1980s, 75% of Cuba's trade had shifted to the former Soviet Union. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 dealt a crippling blow to the island nation and it was forced to find other markets for its goods.<sup>67</sup> Today, 40% of Cuba's foreign trade is with Latin America and other Caribbean countries. Its largest regional trading partners are Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela.<sup>68</sup> A slightly larger proportion of trade goes to the European Union.<sup>69</sup> Other main trading partners include Canada and China.<sup>70, 71</sup> The United States eased some embargo restrictions in 2002 and is now a top import trading partner. Trade with the United States accounts for 4% of Cuba's imports.<sup>72, 73</sup> Most of the sanctions of the U.S. embargo remain in place, and with a few exceptions, U.S. businesses cannot buy or sell in Cuba. The embargo also limits Cuba's ability to interact with international banks and restricts the nation's access to technology.<sup>74, 75</sup>

## Tourism

In the last two decades, Cuba has witnessed a boom in tourism, which is now the nation's largest industry. Tourism accounted for nearly 3% of GDP in 2012.<sup>76, 77, 78</sup> Tourism is also one of Cuba's largest sources of foreign exchange.<sup>79</sup> In 2012, 2.8 million tourists arrived in Cuba, mostly from Canada. Other significant sources of tourists are Caribbean countries, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Germany.<sup>80</sup> Cuba released official data indicating that the second tourist numbers are likely from the United States, in spite of the embargo. Many of those



*Tourist beach*  
© Emmanuel Hybrechts

were likely Cuban-Americans visiting relatives under the relaxed travel restrictions initiated by the Obama administration.<sup>81</sup> Cuba's sandy beaches, cavern complexes, and well-preserved colonial cities are big draws. Ecotourism offers another potential area for development.<sup>82</sup> Medical tourism is on the rise due to the availability of inexpensive quality care from well-trained physicians.<sup>83</sup>

All signs for future growth in the medical tourism industry are positive. It is especially likely to expand if the U.S. listens to the voices calling for a lift on all travel restrictions to the island nation.<sup>84,85</sup> New private accommodations and restaurants are also being built. Furthermore, state-owned travel agencies are now allowed to contract with private agencies. The government is also investing heavily in infrastructure, beach resort facilities, and the renovation of city historical districts.<sup>86,87</sup>



*Cuban Pesos*  
© cheeses / flickr.com

## Banking and Finance

The Central Bank of Cuba was established in 1997, and is the official governing, regulatory and supervising agency of all financial institutions in the nation. Its primary role is to issue local currency, maintain financial stability, propose and implement national monetary policy and to supervise the banking system.<sup>88,89</sup>

The country has a number of commercial banks with branches operating throughout the nation. There are also a number of non-banking financial institutions authorized to carry out the financing of imports and exports, exchange of foreign

currency. They are also authorized to carry out activities related to international trusts, to grant credit and mortgages, and to act as intermediaries between Cuban and foreign companies.<sup>90</sup> Thirteen foreign banks operate in Cuba. These countries include the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Spain, France, Mexico, and Lebanon.<sup>91</sup>

Cuba's national currency is the Cuban Peso (CUP). The government introduced the Convertible Peso (CUC) in 1994 in an effort to stop the circulation of foreign currencies. The CUC is worth significantly less than the CUP. The two currencies exchange at a value of CUP 24 to CUC 1. This makes it difficult for many regular citizens to buy goods because most are payable only in CUC. This creates significant inequalities among workers. For example, individuals who work in tourism are typically paid in CUP while most other workers are paid in CUC.<sup>92,93,94</sup> The more valuable CUC is pegged to the US dollar and is generally used exclusively in tourism or foreign trade sectors.<sup>95</sup> Cuba decided in late 2013 to do away with its dual currency system, although

no specific time frame has been set.<sup>96</sup> The unified currency will help eliminate the extreme wage disparities among workers and make it easier to conduct import/export operations.<sup>97</sup>



*Deteriorating housing  
© Bradford Duplisea*

## Standard of Living

Cubans enjoy a high standard of living, in spite of earning an average of just USD 22 a month. Their high standard of living is due to broad government subsidies for education, medical care, and other social services.<sup>98, 99</sup> Cuba ranks as a “high development” nation on the 2013 Human Development Index. It falls just below Saudi Arabia and above Mexico, Brazil, and Oman.<sup>100, 101</sup> Only three Latin American and Caribbean countries—Argentina, The Bahamas, and Uruguay—ranked higher on the development index than Cuba.<sup>102</sup> Illiteracy is almost nonexistent, average life expectancy is 79.3

years, mean education is 10.2 years, and infant death rates are among the lowest in the world.<sup>103, 104</sup> The vast majority of the population receive adequate food and nutrition.<sup>105</sup>

There are some difficulties, despite this positive image. Data shows that 39% to 57% of all homes in Cuba are in poor or inadequate condition. Many were damaged in hurricanes and have not been repaired. New home construction has been dropping since 2008 and this has created a housing squeeze.<sup>106</sup> Disposable income is decreasing as food and energy prices rise. More workers are also losing their jobs as the government’s economic reforms go into effect.<sup>107, 108</sup> Government investment in social services remains high and is adequate to provide a decent standard of living. Nevertheless, prosperity currently remains beyond the reach of most.<sup>109, 110</sup>



*Man making cigars*  
© Pete Bluesy

## Employment Trends

The government has made an effort to revitalize and modernize its flagging economy by instituting a series of major reforms. These reforms have the potential to redefine the entire face of Cuban employment. The government intends to lay off up to a million state employees by 2016. The government anticipates that these laid-off workers will be absorbed in the expanding private sector. Based on current employment figures, one in five state employees will have to find new jobs.<sup>111</sup>

Many of those new jobs are likely to be in small businesses, such as barber shops, cafes, or in the new non-farm cooperatives.<sup>112</sup> In early 2014, nearly 10% of Cubans were self-employed. This trend will likely continue as restrictions on private sector businesses ease.<sup>113</sup> Slightly more than 200 types of businesses were eligible to be licensed in the private sector by early 2014. Many of these enterprises already existed in Cuba's informal sector. There are expectations that more informal jobs will be formalized as the reforms expand. The informal sector will remain a viable option for those who do not wish to deal with the government bureaucracy, or whose jobs are not eligible for formal status.<sup>114, 115, 116</sup> As the economy transitions, unemployment is not expected to rise significantly above its current level of 3.8%. Instead, estimates indicated that unemployment could fall below 3% in the short term.<sup>117, 118, 119</sup>



Restaurant

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## Public vs. Private Sector

The Cuban nation has maintained a state-run, centralized economy since its revolution in 1959. This began to change when Raúl Castro came to power in 2008. Regulations were further eased on private ownership and business in 2010. This has led to a more market-based economy. Raúl Castro's reforms take a two-pronged approach. The first is the creation of a broader entrepreneurial class of self-employed business persons. The second is to drastically trim the number of state employees. These reforms are in an early stage, but are already having an effect.<sup>120</sup> Estimates suggest that about 20% of Cuba's labor force is now employed in the private sector.<sup>121</sup> The government estimates this number will rise to 35% by 2015.<sup>122</sup> Virtually all of national GDP (95%) was generated by the state in 2012. The government hopes that number will significantly drop by 2017, and that up to 45% of the national GDP will be generated within the private sector.<sup>123</sup>

The government has named 201 businesses eligible for licensing and legal entry into the emerging private sector.<sup>124</sup> However, the government has not completely opened the private sphere. The law requires that all private businesses obtain a license and enter into a contract with the state to rent their venues. Taxi drivers also rent their vehicles from the state-owned taxi company.<sup>125</sup> The government retains control over private import sales and ownership of most property, including real estate.<sup>126, 127</sup>

There are encouraging signs of cooperation between the public and private sector. Cuba's state-run tourism department is beginning to partner with private owners to provide services. This includes privately-run bed and breakfasts, hotels, and restaurants. Private businesses are now listed in the national telephone directory.<sup>128</sup>

Whether this economic transition will be easy is still far from certain. The success of the private sector depends on its ability to access credit, to find supplies and equipment at reasonable prices, and to find available spaces to set up their new businesses.<sup>129</sup> Competition and market forces must be allowed freedom to operate, yet it is not clear that the government is willing to cede all of its control over wages and prices.<sup>130</sup>



*Grocery prices*  
© Marko Kudjerski

## Outlook

The government hopes its new economic reforms will revitalize the economy, even though there is a potential downside in the near term. The country's economy is predicted to decline by 2.2% in 2014.<sup>131</sup> Falling prices for Cuba's main exports, including nickel and sugar, along with its rising food import prices will strain the economy. This will add to the negative balance of trade.<sup>132</sup> Inflation is projected to rise by 5% in 2014.<sup>133</sup>

Cuba has limited access to international financial institutions. This means that foreign investment could remain low. Poor infrastructure and a lack of access to supplies and materials for newly created businesses could slow private sector growth.<sup>134</sup> Political unrest in Venezuela could also threaten the financial agreements signed earlier in 2013.<sup>135</sup> It is unknown how the Cuban people will respond to these economic changes, including loss of pension payments to those who lost their jobs due to state downsizing. It could promote some dissent.<sup>136, 137</sup>

There are some positive signs for the economy, however. Domestic consumption is anticipated to grow, thanks to the growing private sector. Tourism is expected to expand, bringing in much needed foreign capital. Cuba's oil agreements with Venezuela are anticipated to continue to keep energy prices relatively low, as long as the Venezuelan government honors the agreements made by former President Chavez.<sup>138, 139</sup>

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## Overview: Chapter 3 Assessment

1. Raúl Castro has been closed to ideas of economic reform since he came to power.

**FALSE**

Raúl Castro has been more open to changes in the economy. He created opportunities for the private ownership of businesses, self-employment, and announced a plan to end Cuba's dual currency system.

2. Less than one in five Cubans is employed in the industrial sector.

**TRUE**

Cuba's industrial sector is underdeveloped and contributes approximately 22% to national GDP and employs roughly 17% of the labor force.

3. Cuba has the world's largest reserves of nickel.

**FALSE**

Cuba has the second-largest nickel reserves in the world.

4. The United States is one of Cuba's largest trading partners.

**TRUE**

The United States eased some embargo restrictions in 2002 and is now a top import trading partner, accounting for 4% of Cuba's imports.

5. Cuba's official unit of currency is the convertible peso.

**FALSE**

Cuba's national currency is the Cuban Peso (CUP). The government introduced the Convertible Peso (CUC) in 1994 in an effort to stop the circulation of foreign currencies. The CUP is used by citizens for daily purchases and the CUP is used largely for foreign transactions.



*Cuban man*  
© Les Haines

## Chapter 4: Society

### Introduction

Cuba is a multi-ethnic and multi-racial society. Its culture is an eclectic mix of European (largely Spanish), African, indigenous, and Caribbean influences, which makes for a uniquely Cuban way of life.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 11 million people call Cuba home. Cuban society is a racial amalgam, with approximately half or more being a fusion of the various groups who came to Cuba.<sup>2, 3</sup>

Cubans are a proud people. They possess a strong sense of national identity formed from years of struggle for independence, freedom, and equality.<sup>4, 5, 6</sup> Its people are resilient,

outgoing, and sociable. Streets and cafes are often filled with neighbors chatting away the hours, perhaps playing a game of dominoes or *cubiliete*.<sup>7, 8, 9</sup> When not out with friends, Cubans enjoy being at home with family relaxing and watching television.<sup>10</sup>

There are a number of political and economic transformations taking place in Cuba. These will bring changes to the daily lives of the people, and this will inevitably impact Cuban society. Exactly how those will manifest remains to be seen. As in the past, Cubans are likely to meet these new challenges with their usual resilience and creativity, while finding ways to maintain their indomitable spirit, warmth, and joy of life.



*Cuban women and child*  
© Adam Jones

## Ethnic Groups and Racial Categories

The issue of ethnicity in Cuba is complicated, and is often confounded by issues of racial identity. Ethnicity refers to a group of people who identify with each other based on a shared cultural heritage, ancestry, language, food, dress, appearance, etc.<sup>11, 12</sup> The traditions and customs of the indigenous groups, as well as the Europeans, Africans, and Chinese who came to Cuba have been sifted, altered and fused into the national culture that is indisputably Cuban.<sup>13, 14, 15, 16</sup>

Most Cubans have a mixed ethnic heritage stemming from historical factors on the island.<sup>17</sup>

However, Cubans place significant emphasis on “race” when self-identifying their ethnicity, which is linked to skin color and hair color.<sup>18</sup> The combination of mixed ethnic heritage and the emphasis on “race” challenges popular notions of “race” as a strictly biological condition. Physical variations tend to occur gradually within biologically related populations, with people showing a range of physical traits (a range of skin, hair, and eye colors, and other physical features).<sup>19</sup> Consequently, attempts to divide the Cuban population along strict racial lines are subjective, random, and misleading. It is a social artifact of past European colonial strategies to divide, rank, and control the Cuban people.<sup>20, 21</sup> This exposes the notion of “race” as a social construction, used classify and mark social differences.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Cuban’s continue to use at least 12 descriptive “racial” terms linked to their colonial past.<sup>23, 24, 25</sup> These 12 descriptive terms refer to an individual’s “race,” as well as their social status, level of prestige, educational attainment, and other characteristics.<sup>26</sup> These descriptive terms are not imposed by the state, but are self-identified by the individual. Therefore, people can self-identify as white, mixed, or black (the three legally

recognized categories in Cuba), while taking into consideration their physical features, social class, and ethnicity.<sup>27, 28, 29</sup>

The 2012 census report indicates that 64.1% of the population is white, 26.6% mestizo or mulatto, and 9.3% black.<sup>30</sup> Other estimates, including those made by the U.S. Department of State, suggest that the number of mulattos or mestizos is between 50% and 70%.<sup>31, 32, 33</sup> This census disparity is likely related to centuries of black slavery and the economic disadvantages felt by many Cuban's who identified as black.<sup>34, 35, 36, 37</sup> Although many Cubans deny that race is a central feature of life, many Cuban's place emphasis on "whitening" their family through marriage.<sup>38</sup>

Racial discrimination is banned by the constitution, yet still exists in Cuba.<sup>39, 40</sup> Racism in Cuba has not been eradicated, even though and education improved dramatically for Afro-Cubans after the revolution. Afro-Cubans remain marginalized despite the fact that few Cubans are willing to acknowledge it.<sup>41, 42</sup> The issue of "race" has become even more central in Cuba since the economic downturn of the 1990s.<sup>43</sup> The revolution did a lot to equalize "races" in Cuba. However, "race" is an increasingly important a political issue. Some feel that without a more direct recognition of the importance of how ethnicity and "race" are defined in Cuban society, the issue cannot be resolved.<sup>44, 45</sup>



*Cathedral de San Cristobol*  
© Anagoria / Wikipedia.org

## Religion

Cuba is one of the most secular nations in the world. However, since the 1990s there has been a religious resurgence.<sup>46</sup> The Catholic Church estimates that although only 4% to 5% of the population attends mass regularly, 70% of Cubans are actually Catholic.<sup>47</sup> Approximately 5% of the population is Protestant, with the largest numbers belonging to Baptist and Pentecostal groups.<sup>48</sup> Other religious groups include Seventh-Day Adventists, Anglicans, and Muslims and a small number of Jews, Buddhists, and Orthodox Christians.<sup>49</sup> *Santería* is an African based religion and it is also widely practiced.<sup>50, 51</sup>

*Santería* (The Way of the Saints) is a syncretic religion based on West African Yoruba beliefs and traditions. The religion teaches that God has endowed each individual with a specific destiny. To achieve that destiny, practitioners must nurture relationships with spirits (orishas). Animal sacrifice is a central feature of the religion.<sup>52</sup> The religion is popular among the poor, but is also popular among the upper class.<sup>53</sup>

Catholicism arrived in Cuba with the Spanish. Yet, traditional Catholicism never took hold in Cuba, especially among the non-Spanish.<sup>54</sup> Today, many Cubans practice their Catholic religion only a few times a year and often keep images of *Santería* gods in their homes.<sup>55, 56</sup> Many Catholic saints are also matched to corresponding *Santería* spirits. This means that anyone honoring a Catholic saint automatically honors a spirit (*orisha*).<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, the last rites given to a Cuban Catholic are unique due to the influence of blended religious traditions.<sup>58</sup> The contemporary practice of Catholicism in Cuba reveals the unique culture of the people, and the many influences that shaped its Cuban society. It is an exceptional blend of West African religious practices and traditional Catholicism.<sup>59</sup>

Conversely, Pentecostals are one of the fastest growing denominations in modern Cuba, with a membership of nearly 800,000. The movement is national in scope and is particularly strong in Havana's poorest neighborhoods.<sup>60</sup> Its growing popularity is attributed to the sense of community it creates, and to the financial help it provides to its members. In some cities like Moa and Baracoa, 65-70% of the population might be evangelicals.<sup>61</sup>



*Moros y cristianos*  
© Rinaldo Wurglitsch

## Cuisine

### *Food*

Cuban cuisine is a fusion of Spanish, French, African, Chinese, and even Arab dishes.<sup>62</sup> Rice is the traditional staple of any Cuban meal. However, other starchy foods have been introduced and now replace rice at many meals. These foods include yucca root, *malanga* root, and sweet potatoes (*boniato*).<sup>63</sup> *Sofrito* is the foundation of a number of Cuban dishes. *Sofrito* is a pureed sauce made from fried green peppers, garlic, oregano, and pepper. Tomato sauce and black beans are other main ingredients.<sup>64, 65</sup> Cubans meals are not complete

without meat. The most popular choices are pork and chicken. Fish and seafood are also popular choices, when they are available.<sup>66</sup>

The national dish is *ajiaco Cubano*. This is a stew made from root vegetables and meat, and includes *sofrito* as its flavor base.<sup>67</sup> The dish originated with African slaves and is often served for lunch.<sup>68</sup> Another popular meat dish is *lechón asado*, or roast suckling pig. Before the revolution it was a traditional Christmas eve meal. It consists of pork marinated in sour orange juice, ground pepper, oregano, garlic, cloves, and vegetable oil. The meat is then cooked in a pit that is lined with guava leaves, or it is spit-roasted over

an open fire.<sup>69, 70</sup>

*Moros y cristianos* (Moors and Christians) is a common side dish made with a mixture of rice and black beans. Cubans believe that eating this dish on New Year's Day will bring good luck.<sup>71</sup> A similar dish from eastern Cuba is *congrí*. The main difference between these two dishes is that red beans are substituted for the black beans in *congrí*.<sup>72</sup>

Ice cream (*helado*) is the most common dessert eaten in Cuba. Copelia is a favorite brand of ice cream and mango, pineapple, and guava are all popular flavors.<sup>73</sup> Other dessert choices include *plátanos maduros en tentación* (caramelized sweet plantains), *arroz con leche* (rice pudding), Cuban style flan (a custard dessert), and various tropical fruits.<sup>74, 75</sup>

Cuba is sometimes referred to as the “Isle of Rum.” In 1862, the first bottles of Bacardi rum rolled out of the distillery. However, the Bacardi family and the Ron Bacardi Company left Cuba after the revolution. Today, Cubans still enjoy a good drink, but the rum of choice is Havana Club.<sup>76</sup>



*Coffee over Havana*  
© Iker Merodio

## Coffee

Coffee is an important part of Cuban culture. Cubans have a strong love of coffee and they will take almost any opportunity to grab a cup. It is a daily ritual for most and offers a time to socialize. People will usually drink it first thing in the morning and after meals.<sup>77, 78</sup> Cuban coffee is strong and served in small cups. *Café Cubano* is Cuban espresso with sugar added to the brew. Sometimes it comes in a larger container with the coffee meant to be decanted and shared among friends. In this case, it is called *colada*. *Coradito* is espresso topped with steamed milk. *Café con leche* is coffee with hot milk.<sup>79</sup>



*Bata Cubana*  
© James Emery

## Traditional Dress

Traditional Cuban clothing is inspired by their Spanish and African heritage. Contemporary Cubans generally restrict wearing traditional clothing to festivals, weddings, or other special occasions.<sup>80</sup> Tiered skirts with ruffles, brightly colored shirts, and bandanas are typically part of traditional costumes.<sup>81</sup>

The traditional shirt for men, the *guayabera*, is still commonly worn today. The *guayabera* shirt is popular throughout Latin America, even though it is a Cuban invention.<sup>82</sup> Traditional *guayabera* shirts were white or off-white and relatively unadorned. It has two groups of pleats on the front

and three on the back with a total of 27 buttons. There are four pockets on the original version, but many of the modern shirts have only two.<sup>83, 84, 85</sup>

Traditional women's clothing includes the rumba dance dress, the *Bata Cubana*. The *bata cubana* dress usually has multicolored frills and ruffles and is worn with the African headpiece known as the *gele*.<sup>86, 87</sup> The less popular *guayabera* dress is an offshoot of the traditional man's *guayabera* shirt. This dress is worn off the shoulder, is knee-length, and usually has two to four pockets with two sets of pleats down the front and three down the back.<sup>88, 89</sup>



*Cuban policewoman*  
© Emmanuel Huybrechts

## Gender Issues

Cuba's communist ideology is supported equality among genders, and is embedded in the constitution. Gender discrimination is specifically prohibited and punishable with imprisonment.<sup>90</sup> This benefited women, who immediately gained in literacy, education, and employment after the revolution. Additionally, husbands are legally required to help with the domestic chores, including childrearing, if his wife works outside the home.<sup>91</sup> Cuba is currently ranked 15th in the world. On the 2013 gender gap index, it ranked higher than the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany.<sup>92</sup> The greatest

parity comes in the arenas of educational attainment and health. The nation scored low in terms of political empowerment for women, and in terms of offering them opportunities for economic participation.<sup>93</sup> Women constitute only 38% of the labor force and earn less than half of what men earn. Women are underrepresented in positions of power in business and in government.<sup>94, 95, 96</sup>

Like many places in Latin America, *machismo* (an exaggerated concept of “manliness”) continues to be a chief component of Cuban culture.<sup>97, 98</sup> It is important to understand, however, that *machismo* is not something men impose on women. It is a cultural tradition deeply ingrained in both genders.<sup>99</sup> Machismo dictates that women should take a subordinate role to men and that their primary responsibility is to take care of the home and the family.<sup>100, 101, 102</sup> Men are expected to be the authority figures and to be masculine in both private and public life. On the other hand, women are expected to be virtuous and demure.<sup>103</sup> This accounts for some of the common instances of sexual harassment in Cuban society, even though it is against the law.<sup>104</sup> Men often whistle or hiss at women as they walk down the street, which is viewed as a compliment.<sup>105</sup> At its worst, however, *machismo* can and does lead to violence against women.<sup>106, 107</sup>

## Arts

### *Literature*

Cuban literature began to emerge around 1800, with Cuban writers making their mark in the areas of intellectualism and freedom. José Martí is one of the most famous Cuban writers and was the leader of the Modernist movement. Martí was a gifted writer and poet who used his talents to support Cuba’s quest for independence from Spain. Martí was deported to Spain, where he inspired an entire Spanish school of literature devoted to Cuba’s freedom.<sup>108, 109</sup>

In the 1900s, short stories took center stage in Cuban writing.<sup>110</sup> Poetry has always been popular in Cuba and Nicolás Guillén is one of its most famous poets. Guillén was a mulatto and leader of the Afro-Cuban movement of the 1920s. He wrote poems depicting the oppression of the Cubans, resulting in his arrest. He was also deported several times by Batista, but Guillén continued to admire Castro who eventually



*José Martí*  
© John M. Kennedy T.

honored him with the position of Poet Laureate. Guillén held this title until his death in 1989. His post-revolutionary works were dominated by themes of revolution and social protest.<sup>111, 112</sup>

Cuba has experienced little in the way of contemporary literature since the revolution.<sup>113</sup> Among the most popular of the contemporary authors are Leonardo Padura, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez.<sup>114, 115, 116, 117</sup> Economic problems have adversely affected the publication of literary works. Shortages of paper and ink make publishing difficult and popular items often sell out quickly. Two-thirds of the 25 million copies of books published in 2012 were text books.<sup>118, 119</sup>



*Musicians*  
© Matteo Artizzu

## *Music*

Cuba has a rich musical tradition that is a fusion of Spanish and African music. The Cuban musical tradition has inspired music around the globe.<sup>120, 121</sup> Its influence can be found in Argentine tango, Latin salsa, American jazz, and Nuevo-flamenco.<sup>122</sup> Several music genres are closely associated with Cuba. The *guajira* music form shows strong influence from the Andalusian region of Spain and was first popularized around 1800. There are a variety of musical styles within this genre, yet the *Guantanamera* is one of the most popular and is played throughout the world.<sup>123, 124</sup>

A purely Cuban invention is the *Son Cubano* musical genre and forms the basis for modern salsa music. *Son Cubano* was popularized in the latter part of the 1800's and comes from the rural regions of the *Oriente* province in eastern Cuba.<sup>125, 126</sup> Typical themes include those related to patriotism and love.<sup>127</sup>

The *habanera* is another well-known and popular Cuban music form. This dance music is thought to have originated with Cuban slaves. Some argue that *habanera* dance merged with tango flamenco, eventually developing into the tango in Argentina.<sup>128, 129</sup>



Yara Cinema

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## Cinema

Castro established a cinematography department immediately following the revolution in 1959. Documentaries with patriotic themes were some of the earliest films. These early films paved the way for the production of uniquely Cuban films during the 1960s. This decade is considered the golden era of Cuban cinematography, showcasing comedies, ironic films about bureaucracy, and historical dramas.<sup>130, 131</sup>

State funding for the film industry largely ended in 1991, and Cuban studios struggled to find financing. This caused an industry crash that lasted for much of the 90s. During this period there were few Cuban movie successes.<sup>132</sup> One

exception was the Cuban film, “Strawberry and Chocolate.” It was nominated for an Oscar as Best Foreign Film in 1993. It did not win the Academy Award, yet it did win the Special Jury Prize at the 1994 Berlin International Film Festival.<sup>133,134</sup> Another Cuban film, “Nothing,” won the Jury’s Grand Award at the 2003 Miami International Film Festival in 2003.<sup>135</sup> Money continues to put serious constraints on the industry and Cuban film studios often partner with Mexican and other Latin American filmmakers to finance their productions.



Street art

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## Painting and Poster Art

Cuban artists shifted away from conventional European creative themes, after their nation’s independence from Spain. This ushered in an artistic era focusing on common aspects of Cuban life and folklore. Many Cuban artists during this period used surrealist and cubist techniques to create their uniquely Cuban paintings.<sup>136</sup> For example, the prominent artist Eduardo Abela produced his famous murals illustrating the poor and working class. These paintings became the rallying point for those who later criticized the government of Gerardo Machado in the 1920s and 30s. Eduardo Abela was eventually driven out of the country, ushering in a post-revolutionary era of censorship for visual artists.<sup>137, 138</sup> Artwork that did not focus on revolutionary themes continued to be discouraged, until state influence waned in the 1980s.

Contemporary artistic themes tend to portray the customs of ordinary Cubans engaged in everyday life.<sup>139</sup>



*Dominos in the street*  
© mm-j / flickr.com

## Sports and Recreation

Cubans have been playing baseball since the 1860s, and it is the most popular sport in the island nation.<sup>140</sup> American sailors and Cuban students studying in the United States brought the game to the island. Teams from the United States regularly visited Cuba for spring training and to play against Cuban teams, until it was abolished as a professional sport in 1961.<sup>141, 142</sup> Castro's government replaced professional leagues with a state-run amateur sports program. The state-sponsored Cuban team dominated amateur competitions for a number of years.<sup>143</sup> The national team won gold medals in the 1992, 1996, and 2004 Olympics and took silver medals

in 2000 and 2008.<sup>144</sup> Many top Cuban players have found their way to the United States.<sup>145</sup> The most famous of these players are Jose Canseco, Luis Tiant, Tony Oliva, Mike Cuellar, and Rafael Palmeiro.<sup>146</sup> In 2013, 22 Cubans were playing on major league teams in the United States, second only to the Dominican Republic (144), Venezuela (106), and Canada (24).<sup>147</sup>

Basketball is also a popular pastime. Cuba hosted the 17th Caribbean Basketball Championships in 2004. Cuba won both the men's and women's tournaments.<sup>148</sup> They also won the bronze medal in the 1972 Olympics.<sup>149</sup> Several Cubans have played basketball on the international stage, including Lazaro Manuel Borrell Hernández. He played for the Seattle SuperSonics in the 1999-2000 season. He was later traded to the New York Knickerbockers.<sup>150</sup> Andrés Guibert played for the Minnesota Timberwolves from 1993-1995.<sup>151</sup>

Other popular sports place Cuba on the international sports scene. Cuban athletes have won a number of Olympic competitions, receiving 63 boxing medals, 17 wrestling medals, 16 fencing medals, and 5 volleyball medals.<sup>152</sup> Cuban national track and field teams are also strong competitors, where they have won 37 Olympic medals.<sup>153</sup>

The average Cuban likes to relax with two popular traditional games, dominos and cubilete. Dominos is a long-standing Cuban pastime and is sometimes referred to as Cuba's second national sport.<sup>154, 155</sup> *Cubilete* is a dice-game and is second only to dominoes as a national favorite.<sup>156, 157</sup>

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## Overview: Chapter 4 Assessment

1. The majority of Cubans self-identify as “white,” but are actually multi-racial.

**TRUE**

Most Cubans are multi-racial. The 2012 census reports that 64.1% of the population is white, 26.6% mestizo or mulatto, and 9.3% black. U.S. Department of State estimates suggest that the number of mulattos or mestizos is between 50% and 70%.

2. Most Cubans are active Catholics.

**FALSE**

Cuba is among the most secular nations in the world. Since the 1990s there has been resurgence in religion. The Catholic Church estimates that while 70% of Cubans are actually Catholic, only 4% to 5% of the population attends mass regularly.

3. Cuba’s national dish is a stew made from meat and root vegetables.

**TRUE**

The national dish is ajiaco Cubano. It is a stew made from root vegetables and meat, and includes sofrito as its flavor base. The dish originated with African slaves and is often served for lunch.

4. Cubans are strong supporters of their professional baseball and basketball teams.

**FALSE**

There are no professional sports teams in Cuba. All professional leagues were abolished after the revolution and replaced with a national amateur sports program.

5. Machismo is an exaggerated sense of manliness and remains deeply embedded in Cuban culture.

**TRUE**

Like many places in Latin America, machismo (an exaggerated concept of “manliness”) continues to be a main part of Cuban culture.



*Tourists*  
© Rob Koopman

## Chapter 5: Security

### Introduction

Cuba's foreign policy is largely based on pragmatism.<sup>1</sup> This means that Cuba's policy is frequently in conflict with United States interests. As a result, the United States has taken a hardline stance against Cuba's foreign policy since the early 1960s. This has isolated Cuba and forced it to look to other countries for trade and diplomacy.<sup>2</sup> Cuba has worked hard in recent years to establish relations with Asia and some Western nations, as well as with its Latin American neighbors. These efforts have been broadly successful and in 2014, Cuba had direct diplomatic relations with 190 nations.<sup>3</sup>

Cuba's foreign policy is threefold. The first element includes the diversification of the nation's stagnating economy.<sup>4</sup> Cuba plans to reduce its dependence on cash crops, including sugar and tobacco and shift its focus to natural resources, such as nickel. The government is also pushing to develop its tourism industry in an attempt to end the

nation's relative isolation.<sup>5,6</sup>

Second, Cuba is actively trying to build new alliances by expanding its diplomatic ties throughout the world.<sup>7</sup> Its first efforts were aimed at Europe and Canada. Later efforts focused on Latin America, where they forged important political and economic ties with Venezuela and Brazil.<sup>8</sup> Cuba and Venezuela founded the Bolivarian Alternative to the Americas (ALBA) in 2004.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of ALBA is to counterbalance the influence of the Organization of American States (OAS) since Cuba is prohibited from participating OAS.<sup>10</sup> Cuba is also a member of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, an organization aimed at strengthening regional political and economic relations.<sup>11</sup> The nation's foreign policy efforts have gone global in the last few years. More than 70 heads of state, including China and Russia, have visited the country.<sup>12</sup>

The final push for normalization of Cuban foreign policy includes establishing diplomatic relations with the United States. This could open doors to badly needed trade and investment.<sup>13</sup>

## U.S.-Cuban Relations

Cuban-American relations have been strained since Castro assumed power in 1959.<sup>14</sup> The U.S. government was angered by Cuba's nationalization of U.S. properties, and the imposition of high import taxes on U.S. goods. President Kennedy responded by implementing a complete embargo against Cuba, including severe travel restrictions. Kennedy also cut all diplomatic ties with Castro's government in 1961, while also backing a failed invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs. This infuriated Castro and fueled his growing mistrust of the United States. Castro indicated that this confirmed his suspicions that the United States intended to overthrow his government. He consequently turned to the Soviet Union.<sup>15,16</sup>

The U.S. embargo was further strengthened by U.S. legislative acts in 1992 and 1996. The new legislation essentially confirmed that relations would not be restored until Cuba transitioned to a democratic government.<sup>17,18</sup> In spite of this, U.S. restrictions have both relaxed and tightened since 2000. For example, following a devastating hurricane in 2014, the United States agreed to sell food to Cuba. That agreement is still in effect and the United States is currently Cuba's fifth-largest import partner.<sup>19,20</sup> Other restrictions have been lifted, including the travel ban on Cuban-Americans who wish to return to Cuba to visit family.<sup>21</sup> Cuban-Americans are also currently allowed to send remittances to the island. Together, these make up a significant amount of revenue and help bolster Cuba's economy.<sup>22,23</sup>

There has been some softening of relations between the U.S. and Cuba since Raúl Castro assumed the presidency in 2008. However, diplomatic relations between the two countries are still non-existent.<sup>24,25</sup> Cuba remains on the U.S. list of state sponsors

of terrorism, even though the State Department announced in 2012 that it found no evidence of Cuba's direct or indirect support of terrorist groups.<sup>26</sup> Regardless, relations between the two countries are still the best they have been in years. American opinions have shifted toward Cuba and a majority favors normalizing relations.<sup>27</sup> It remains unclear whether official U.S. policy will change. More and more voices are calling this a historic opportunity for the United States to engage with Cuba. Others, however, remain convinced that current policy should remain in place.<sup>28</sup>

## Relations with Other Countries

### *Brazil*

Fidel Castro sought to forge strong ties with Brazil since the first days of his administration. Yet, Brazil seemed disinterested in forming any alliance with Cuba. Brazil chose instead to keep a cautious distance from the fledgling republic of Cuba, even though Brazil's left-leaning President Lula da Silva was Castro's personal friend.<sup>29</sup> This relationship changed in 2008 when Brazil's state-owned oil companies signed exploration agreements with Cuba. This has significantly strengthened their relations.<sup>30</sup>

Brazil and Cuba recently implemented a series of initiatives designed to help Cuba transition to a more market-based economy. Brazil is also investing heavily in infrastructure projects.<sup>31</sup> Its largest investment is Cuba's Mariel Beacon project to build a port at Mariel. Brazil also intends to finance the modernization of Cuba's airports.<sup>32, 33</sup> Brazil is likewise assisting in the improvement of Cuban farm yields and is investing in Cuban sugar and ethanol industries.<sup>34, 35</sup> Brazil is now one of the island nation's top three trading partners.<sup>36, 37</sup>

A significant program in the Brazilian initiative is the importation of large numbers of Cuban doctors to augment Brazil's weakening social

services.<sup>38</sup> Brazil has also taken up offshore oil explorations for Cuba. These initiatives are beneficial to both countries, yet they have not been without problems. At least one Cuban doctor applied for asylum in Brazil, placing Brazil in an embarrassing political



*Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva*  
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position.<sup>39</sup> Brazil has also halted its offshore oil exploration project in Cuba, because they were unable to find exploitable resources.<sup>40, 41</sup>



*Hu Jintao*  
© Dilma Rousseff

### *China-Cuba Relations*

For years, Cuba had a significant Chinese community. The first Chinese were brought in as indentured servants in the late 1850s to work on sugar plantations. Free Chinese farmers also came to the island over the next 50 years and became an important part of Cuban society.<sup>42, 43, 44</sup> Chinese-Cubans even participated in Cuba's first wars of independence against Spain, yet many Chinese-Cubans fled during or shortly after the revolution.<sup>45</sup>

Castro severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan after the revolution and recognized the People's Republic of China. The two countries established formal diplomatic relations. However, China's growing alliance with the Soviet Union and its invasion of Vietnam in 1979, prompted harsh words from Castro. Such public criticism prompted China to cool their relations with Cuba.<sup>46</sup>

China introduced its own series of economic reforms in the 1980s, easing tensions and improving relations. This paved the way for China to become Cuba's second-largest trading partner by the mid-1990s. China's then-president, Hu Jintao visited Cuba in 2008 and several months later, Hu invited Raúl Castro to visit China. Hu indicated that such a visit would help Castro understand how economic reforms transformed China. Hu suggested that similar market-oriented reforms might work for Cuba. Castro returned home and began to implement similar reforms in Cuba. The Chinese government provided assistance to initiate changes that would lead Cuba to a more market-based economy. It delivered low interest loans to Cuba and has sent much needed technology.<sup>47, 48</sup> This has resulted in a dramatic increase in trade relations between the two nations.<sup>49</sup> Today, bilateral trade is approximately USD 2 billion.<sup>50</sup>

## Colombia

Cuba established formal diplomatic relations with Columbia in 1902. However, diplomatic relations between the two nations broke off in 1961 and were not reestablished until 1975. Diplomatic ties were again severed in 1981, with consular relations being restored in 1991. Full diplomatic status was again reestablished in 1993.<sup>51</sup>

The two countries have engaged in high level talks about trade, tourism, and economic investment.<sup>52</sup> This has resulted in a number of agreements that promote cooperation in anti-drug trafficking efforts, in tourism, and between their police and judiciary.<sup>53</sup> Cuba has even agreed to host peace talks in their country, between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) in 2012. FARC is a guerilla group at the forefront of a long-standing insurgency campaign against the Colombian government.<sup>54</sup> Cuba continues to host the ongoing peace talks in 2014.<sup>55</sup>

## Mexico

Cuba and Mexico have traditionally had a long and close relationship. Mexico was the only country in the Western hemisphere to have cordial relations with Cuba after the 1959 revolution.<sup>56</sup> This close relationship was somewhat disrupted in 2004, when Cuba deported a Mexican businessman accused of corruption.<sup>57, 58</sup> Mexico responded by recalling its ambassador to Havana. Relations have remained somewhat strained between the two countries.<sup>59</sup>

Current Mexican president, Enrique Peña Nieto, has taken a number of steps to improve relations with Cuba.<sup>60</sup> Peña Nieto met with Raúl Castro in 2013 to strengthen trade, financial, educational, and other cooperation agreements. Mexico also announced its intent to continue high level talks to improve Cuban trade and investment opportunities.<sup>61, 62</sup> Mexico even extended an expanded credit line to Cuba and forgave 70% of the country's debt.<sup>63</sup> Talks in early February 2014 focused on increasing bilateral trade relations. Mexico is currently Cuba's third-largest Latin American trading partner, behind Venezuela and Brazil. Mexico also holds USD 730 million in Cuban direct investments, a number that both



*Enrique Peña Nieto*  
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countries look to increase.<sup>64, 65, 66</sup>



*Hugo Chávez*  
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## *Venezuela*

Venezuela enjoys strong relations with Cuba. This strong relationship stems from the friendship between Fidel Castro and former Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez. Castro mentored Chávez when he rose to power and helped him create a socialist republic in Venezuela. Chávez even sought medical treatment in a Havana hospital after he was diagnosed with cancer. Many in Venezuela resented their relationship. They feared that Chávez was sending money to Cuba that could improve the lives of Venezuelans.<sup>67</sup>

Castro and Chávez signed a series of agreements in 2000, which remain in effect.<sup>68, 69</sup> One of these agreements provided more than 100,000 barrels of oil a day to Cuba, at heavily subsidized prices. Furthermore, Cuba agreed to send about 40,000 doctors to Venezuela. This was designed to bolster Chávez's social programs, to improve medical care, and to improve healthcare access for the poor. Castro also offered additional support to the Chávez government by sending intelligence and security experts to Venezuela.<sup>70</sup>

The strong relationship between Cuba and Venezuela started to weaken after Castro's resignation and Chávez's death. Venezuela has nevertheless maintained its position as Cuba's largest trading partner.<sup>71, 72</sup> There are currently

more than 400 joint ventures between the two nations. Some estimates suggest that as much as 22% of Cuba's GDP and 40% of Cuba's total trade are directly dependent on Venezuela.<sup>73, 74</sup>

The current president, Nicolás Maduro, seems inclined to maintain Chávez's policies, but his hold on power is tenuous. Maduro's opponents would like to see a reduction in Venezuela's subsidies to Cuba, so policies might change in the near future.<sup>75</sup>

## *European Union-Cuba Relations*

The European Union (EU) has significant economic interests in Cuba. The EU is Cuba's second-largest foreign investor and one of the country's largest trading partners.<sup>76, 77</sup> For example, Spain has invested heavily in tourism infrastructure, including hotels. However, the EU imposed trade sanctions on Cuba in 2008 after years of tension over Cuba's human rights record.

The "Common Position" provision is impetus for these trade sanctions. This provision was adopted by the EU in 1966. It was designed to put pressure on Cuba to improve its human rights record and to establish a more democratic government.<sup>78</sup> This provision continues to make it difficult to normalize relations between the EU and Cuba. There is also some indication that Spain wants to adopt an even harsher stance toward Cuba.<sup>79</sup> In early 2014, the EU agreed to launch new negotiations aimed at restoring full

trade relations. This would end nearly 10 years of embargo.<sup>80, 81</sup> The EU took this move to signal support for the more liberal reforms currently underway in Cuba. However, the EU has warned that there are red lines that must not be crossed. Improving human rights in Cuba is foremost among these.<sup>82</sup>

## *Russia-Cuba Relations*

Vladimir Putin and Moscow have recently renewed interest in Cuban affairs and gave Cuba a significant loan, while offering to re-equip and strengthen the Cuban army. Russia also announced plans to build a munitions factory in Cuba in 2011 and provided humanitarian aid after a series of devastating earthquakes. In 2013, the Russian government agreed to forgive part of Cuba's debt, while refinancing the remainder of the loan. Recently, new agreements were reached in the areas of oil exploration, electricity generation, and construction in the tourism industry, and Russian ships are now allowed to refuel in Cuba. Trade between the two nations is expanding rapidly at a time when Russian relations with the NATO alliance and the United States have deteriorated.<sup>83</sup>



*Vladimir Putin*

© Russian Presidential Press and Information Office



*Police and patrol car*  
© Dickelbers / Wikipedia.org

## Police

The 15,000-member National Revolutionary Police (PNR) is primarily responsible for policing the civilian population.<sup>84</sup> The PNR handles routine criminal investigations, and occasionally joins other security forces to maintain political order.<sup>85</sup> The police are divided into principal, municipal, and barrio divisions.<sup>86</sup> The PNR is headed by a director general who is directly supervised by the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>87</sup> Crime in the country is significantly lower than in the rest of the Western hemisphere. This is due to the strict controls put in place by state security agencies.<sup>88</sup>

The Department of State Security or the secret police are responsible for political control. Their numbers are roughly equal to that of the PNR but its officers are plain-clothed.<sup>89</sup> The Department of State Security also falls under the direct supervision of the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>90</sup>

There are an additional 5,000 Border Guard Troops (BGT) that fall under the Ministry of the Interior. These are distinct from the Frontier Guards. The Frontier Guards are deployed exclusively around the perimeter of the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo.<sup>91</sup> The BGT have light infantry weapons and land and air patrol aircraft.<sup>92</sup>

## Military

The Cuban military consists of approximately 50,000 to 55,000 troops, and is divided into the Revolutionary Armed Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias/FAR*), Navy (*Marina de Guerra Revolucionaria/ MGR*), and Air Force (*Defensa Anti-Aérea y Fuerza Aérea Revolucionaria/ DAAFAR*).<sup>93</sup> The largest of these is the FAR, with approximately 40,000 well-trained and highly professional troops.<sup>94</sup> The air force has approximately 10,000 troops.<sup>95</sup> Cuba's navy consists of 2,800 troops including 550 marines.<sup>96</sup> Fuel shortages and the lack of equipment have compromised the military's ability to operate. However, the Cuban army maintains the capability to provide considerable resistance to regional powers, including the United States.<sup>97</sup>



*Soldiers walking*  
© Antefixus U.E. / flickr.com

## *Army*

The army is subdivided into three geographic commands: the Western, Eastern, and Central armies. Each of these is a self-sufficient entity.<sup>98</sup> Each command is divided into municipal sectors, with a local headquarters and authority over the territorial militia.<sup>99</sup> The primary responsibility for rapid response lies with the three-battalion paratroop/special forces brigade.<sup>100</sup> Each army has at least one armored division, and three infantry divisions.<sup>101</sup> Each of these defense zones has a rapid reaction force and is capable of immediate response to any threat.<sup>102</sup> One infantry brigade is also stationed on the Isla de Juventud.<sup>103</sup>

Special forces units (TDPs) are charged with troop readiness and loyalty within the regular army. These TDPs have political, conventional, counter-intelligence and military police roles and capabilities.<sup>104</sup>

In addition to regular army forces, there are 700,000-800,000 reserves, 15,000 armed National Revolutionary Police and 1,500 special troops. Approximately 3,500 border troops are also available, although their main function is to protect Cuba from unauthorized entry by sea or air.<sup>105, 106</sup> Cuba has a 100,000-member Youth Labor Army that is provided with equipment and engages in military training. The Youth Labor Army can be pressed into service if needed.<sup>107</sup>

Most training facilities and institutions are located in and around the capital, including the main facility at Managua.<sup>108</sup> Morale within the regular army is generally high due to recent increases in benefits and pay increases. Cuban soldiers demonstrate a high degree of professionalism. Three in four officers are graduates of military schools. Most of the officer corps has combat experience, mainly from African campaigns in the 1980s. Each unit has a political advisor to provide training in Marxist doctrine.<sup>109</sup>

Cuba's equipment is aging and some is even obsolete. Shortages of spare parts have reduced the availability of equipment. The same is true of Cuban tanks, many of which are from the Soviet era. Some of the T-55 and T-62 tanks were modernized in recent years, and are now equipped with night-vision capability.<sup>110</sup>

## *Navy*

Cuba's naval forces are divided into Western and Eastern districts. The Western district is headquartered in Havana, while the Eastern district is headquartered in Holguín. Each naval station has an amphibious assault battalion and a security unit. The navy has no capacity to provide air support. It operates two coastal defense batteries (one near Havana and the other at Nicaro) equipped with truck-mounted missile launchers.<sup>111</sup> The navy may have as many as four Delfin-class mini submarines.<sup>112</sup> All officers are trained at the naval Academy at Punta Santa Ana, west of Havana.<sup>113</sup>

The navy's main role is to defend Cuba's territorial waters and prevent the landing of enemy troops during war. Conversely, the navy regulates the Merchant Marine in peacetime, maintains navigational aids, and prevents illegal entry.<sup>114</sup> Many of the ships are in poor condition and suffer from a severe shortage of parts. The MGR's role is largely that of a coastal patrol, although some of its ships are equipped with anti-ship missile launchers.<sup>115</sup> At present, the MGR cannot sustain operations beyond territorial waters. The navy has a large number of reserve forces, yet it does not have enough seaworthy vessels for those troops. Eight Osa-II fast attack craft provide a minimal rapid reaction capability.

## *Air Force*

Cuba's air force has been particularly hard hit by parts and fuel shortages, and few of the existing aircraft are operational.<sup>116</sup> This limits the number of flying hours for trained pilots, contributing to low morale.<sup>117</sup> Command is instead focused on updating early warning systems, radar systems, and missiles, and procurement of aircraft is currently on hold.<sup>118</sup> The air force is mainly engaged in anti-drug trafficking efforts, to and from the United States and South America.

Cuban airspace is also divided into the Western Air Zone and the Eastern Air Zone. The headquarters of the Western Air Zone is located at San Antonio de los Baños, while the headquarters of the Eastern Air Zone is located at Holguín. Most members of the air force attend a four to five year training program at the Air Force school in San Julián.<sup>119</sup> Actual flight training takes place at Holguín and San Antonio. The airfields at Camagüey, Cienfuegos, and San Julián are operational, but they are no longer used.<sup>120</sup>

## Issues Affecting Stability

### *Government Transition*

Cuba's government is in a state of transition as it implements economic reforms. President Raúl Castro has also announced plans to step down at the end of his current term in 2018. This will be the first time since the revolution that the Castro family has not controlled the government.<sup>121, 122, 123</sup> The loss of nearly a million state jobs, the elimination of the dual currency system, and the end to food subsidies has the potential to disrupt the national system.<sup>124, 125, 126, 127</sup> This creates uncertainty about President Castro's ability to maintain control over the political system during this time of change.

The government continues to actively promote a sense of domestic insecurity in the population by spreading reports that the United States will take advantage of Cuba during its transition. Cuban military forces remain on alert. They continue to carry out training exercises designed to foil what they regard as a second invasion attempt by the United States.<sup>128</sup>



*Elderly woman*  
© Michele Solmi

### *Demographic Change*

Cuba's current demographic picture poses a potential risk to stability.<sup>129</sup> Cubans are having fewer children and many young people are leaving. Cuba's remaining population is therefore increasingly older. This will inevitably reduce economic growth as a shrinking labor force tries to provide for the expanding elderly population.<sup>130</sup> Estimates suggest that, given current trends, 30% of the population would be over 60 by 2030.<sup>132</sup> Most of the nation's highest politicians are also aging, including Raúl Castro who will be 87 when he leaves office in 2017. The government has to find a way to transition its power to the younger generation, although this could destabilize the nation.<sup>133</sup>

Actually, the youth who remain in Cuba appear to be much less wed to the principles of the revolution, preferring a more open and consumer society. Nearly seven in ten Cubans were born after the revolution. This means that most people are likely to focus on current government problems, than on past abuses.<sup>134</sup>



*Street in Cuba*

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## Outlook

Cuba faces a number of challenges as it heads into a new era. President Castro's economic reforms look promising, yet the National Assembly curtailed many of the proposed changes.<sup>135</sup> There are increases in political repression and a corresponding increase in the arrest of dissenters.<sup>136, 137, 138</sup> Castro shows no signs of giving up any political control, or of weakening the role of state security services.<sup>139</sup> There were more than 6,400 political arrests in 2013, with more than 1,000 occurring in December of that year.<sup>140</sup>

The Maplecroft political risk assessment rates Cuba a high political risk, but there is no indication that the government is in risk of imminent danger.<sup>141,142</sup> The Cuban government currently maintains strict control over the country and its citizens. However, Cubans increasingly perceive that old style socialism will not continue, especially after President Castro steps down in 2018.<sup>143</sup> The most immediate threat is the current state of unrest in Venezuela. If the Maduro government falls, or if the oil agreements with Cuba are altered, the Cuban economy could shrink as much as 8% overnight.<sup>144, 145, 146, 147</sup>

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## Overview: Chapter 5 Assessment

1. The United States reestablished formal diplomatic ties with Cuba.

**FALSE**

The United States has not had formal diplomatic ties with Cuba since 1961.

2. Venezuela is Cuba's most important trading partner.

**TRUE**

Venezuela is Cuba's top trading partner. Estimates suggest that as much as 22% of Cuban GDP depends directly on Venezuela.

3. Cuba has had poor relations with Mexico since Fidel Castro came to power, because of Mexico's close ties to the United States.

**FALSE**

Cuba and Mexico have traditionally had a long and close relationship. Mexico was the only country in the Western hemisphere to have cordial relations with Cuba after the 1959 revolution.

4. Brazil has begun investing heavily in Cuba, especially infrastructure projects such as ports and airports.

**TRUE**

Brazil is investing heavily in infrastructure projects. Its largest investment is Cuba's Mariel Beacon project to build a port at Mariel. Brazil also intends to finance the modernization of Cuba's airports.

5. The army is the largest branch of Cuba's military forces.

**TRUE**

The army is the largest military entity, with approximately 40,000 well-trained and highly professional troops.

## *Cuba in Perspective: Final Assessment*

1. The nation of Cuba consists of a single island.  
**True or False?**
2. Average temperatures across the nation vary only slightly throughout the year.  
**True or False?**
3. Cuba's west coast is the most vulnerable to hurricanes and tropical storms.  
**True or False?**
4. Cuba's tallest mountains are in the central region of the nation.  
**True or False?**
5. Cuba is the most biodiverse Caribbean nation.  
**True or False?**
6. Chinese laborers were brought to Cuba to replace African slaves on the sugar plantations.  
**True or False?**
7. Many of the tensions that led to Cuba's first civil war were between Spanish-born Cubans and Cuban-born Spanish.  
**True or False?**
8. Castro has always been a dedicated communist.  
**True or False?**
9. Although no longer president, Fidel Castro retains his position as Secretary of the Communist Party.  
**True or False?**

10. Raúl Castro is restructuring the Cuban economy and encouraging private enterprise.  
**True or False?**
11. Agriculture is the backbone of the Cuban economy.  
**True or False?**
12. Cuba's main export is services.  
**True or False?**
13. Foreign banks are prohibited from operating in Cuba.  
**True or False?**
14. Cuba has a high standard of living.  
**True or False?**
15. Approximately 20% of Cuba's labor force is employed in private industry.  
**True or False?**
16. Ethnicity is the key component in creating a sense of self-identity in Cuba.  
**True or False?**
17. Pentecostals are the fastest growing religious group in Cuba.  
**True or False?**
18. Cuba's musical traditions have had little impact outside the nation.  
**True or False?**
19. Cuba's most popular pastime, after baseball, is dominoes.  
**True or False?**
20. Cuba has had a poor record on gender equality since 1959.  
**True or False?**

21. Ethnicity is the key component in creating a sense of self-identity in Cuba.

**True or False?**

22. Pentecostals are the fastest growing religious group in Cuba.

**True or False?**

23. Cuba's musical traditions have had little impact outside the nation.

**True or False?**

24. Cuba's most popular pastime, after baseball, is dominoes.

**True or False?**

25. Cuba has had a poor record on gender equality since 1959.

**True or False?**

## Cuba in Perspective: Further Reading

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