

World
Watch
Research

Cuba: Full Country Dossier

January 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

January 2024

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

| Rank | Country | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2024 | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 |
|------|--------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | North Korea | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 12.8 | 96 | 98 | 96 | 94 | 94 |
| 2 | Somalia | 16.5 | 16.7 | 16.6 | 16.6 | 16.6 | 10.6 | 93 | 92 | 91 | 92 | 92 |
| 3 | Libya | 15.9 | 16.0 | 15.9 | 16.1 | 16.4 | 10.2 | 91 | 88 | 91 | 92 | 90 |
| 4 | Eritrea | 14.6 | 14.9 | 15.5 | 15.9 | 15.7 | 12.8 | 89 | 89 | 88 | 88 | 87 |
| 5 | Yemen | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 5.9 | 89 | 89 | 88 | 87 | 85 |
| 6 | Nigeria | 13.5 | 13.9 | 14.5 | 14.9 | 14.4 | 16.7 | 88 | 88 | 87 | 85 | 80 |
| 7 | Pakistan | 13.2 | 13.9 | 15.0 | 15.1 | 13.1 | 16.7 | 87 | 86 | 87 | 88 | 88 |
| 8 | Sudan | 14.1 | 14.2 | 14.9 | 14.9 | 15.5 | 13.3 | 87 | 83 | 79 | 79 | 85 |
| 9 | Iran | 15.0 | 14.6 | 13.5 | 15.8 | 16.5 | 10.9 | 86 | 86 | 85 | 86 | 85 |
| 10 | Afghanistan | 15.7 | 15.9 | 15.2 | 16.3 | 16.6 | 4.6 | 84 | 84 | 98 | 94 | 93 |
| 11 | India | 12.2 | 12.6 | 13.3 | 14.8 | 13.2 | 16.5 | 83 | 82 | 82 | 83 | 83 |
| 12 | Syria | 13.4 | 14.3 | 13.9 | 14.3 | 14.2 | 11.1 | 81 | 80 | 78 | 81 | 82 |
| 13 | Saudi Arabia | 15.2 | 15.3 | 14.8 | 15.7 | 16.6 | 3.3 | 81 | 80 | 81 | 78 | 79 |
| 14 | Mali | 11.1 | 10.1 | 14.7 | 12.8 | 15.1 | 15.6 | 79 | 76 | 70 | 67 | 66 |
| 15 | Algeria | 14.4 | 14.1 | 11.5 | 14.0 | 15.6 | 9.8 | 79 | 73 | 71 | 70 | 73 |
| 16 | Iraq | 14.2 | 14.4 | 14.0 | 14.8 | 13.9 | 7.8 | 79 | 76 | 78 | 82 | 76 |
| 17 | Myanmar | 12.2 | 10.6 | 13.4 | 13.7 | 13.0 | 16.1 | 79 | 80 | 79 | 74 | 73 |
| 18 | Maldives | 15.6 | 15.5 | 13.6 | 16.0 | 16.4 | 0.9 | 78 | 77 | 77 | 77 | 78 |
| 19 | China | 13.0 | 10.0 | 12.8 | 14.6 | 16.0 | 11.1 | 78 | 77 | 76 | 74 | 70 |
| 20 | Burkina Faso | 11.7 | 9.7 | 13.2 | 11.5 | 13.8 | 15.6 | 75 | 71 | 68 | 67 | 66 |
| 21 | Laos | 11.6 | 10.6 | 13.2 | 14.3 | 14.0 | 11.3 | 75 | 68 | 69 | 71 | 72 |
| 22 | Cuba | 13.2 | 8.7 | 13.8 | 13.3 | 15.1 | 8.7 | 73 | 70 | 66 | 62 | 52 |
| 23 | Mauritania | 14.6 | 14.2 | 13.8 | 14.2 | 14.2 | 1.3 | 72 | 72 | 70 | 71 | 68 |
| 24 | Morocco | 13.2 | 13.8 | 11.7 | 12.8 | 14.4 | 5.4 | 71 | 69 | 69 | 67 | 66 |
| 25 | Uzbekistan | 14.6 | 12.7 | 13.9 | 12.6 | 15.5 | 1.7 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 73 |
| 26 | Bangladesh | 12.4 | 10.6 | 12.5 | 10.8 | 10.4 | 14.1 | 71 | 69 | 68 | 67 | 63 |
| 27 | Niger | 9.4 | 9.6 | 14.5 | 7.7 | 13.1 | 15.9 | 70 | 70 | 68 | 62 | 60 |
| 28 | CAR | 10.3 | 8.6 | 13.9 | 9.6 | 12.2 | 15.6 | 70 | 70 | 68 | 66 | 68 |
| 29 | Turkmenistan | 14.2 | 12.3 | 13.6 | 13.9 | 15.5 | 0.6 | 70 | 70 | 69 | 70 | 70 |
| 30 | Nicaragua | 12.1 | 7.6 | 13.2 | 13.2 | 14.1 | 9.6 | 70 | 65 | 56 | 51 | 41 |
| 31 | Oman | 14.3 | 14.0 | 10.6 | 13.3 | 14.0 | 3.1 | 69 | 65 | 66 | 63 | 62 |
| 32 | Ethiopia | 9.9 | 9.7 | 12.6 | 10.4 | 12.1 | 14.4 | 69 | 66 | 66 | 65 | 63 |
| 33 | Tunisia | 12.3 | 13.2 | 10.2 | 12.4 | 13.8 | 6.9 | 69 | 67 | 66 | 67 | 64 |
| 34 | Colombia | 11.1 | 8.6 | 12.9 | 11.3 | 10.4 | 14.1 | 68 | 71 | 68 | 67 | 62 |
| 35 | Vietnam | 11.3 | 9.4 | 12.4 | 13.8 | 14.2 | 7.2 | 68 | 70 | 71 | 72 | 72 |
| 36 | Bhutan | 13.1 | 12.1 | 12.4 | 14.1 | 14.3 | 2.2 | 68 | 66 | 67 | 64 | 61 |
| 37 | Mexico | 11.5 | 8.5 | 12.5 | 11.1 | 10.6 | 14.1 | 68 | 67 | 65 | 64 | 60 |
| 38 | Egypt | 12.5 | 13.7 | 11.4 | 11.9 | 10.9 | 7.8 | 68 | 68 | 71 | 75 | 76 |
| 39 | Mozambique | 9.3 | 8.5 | 13.9 | 8.4 | 12.5 | 15.0 | 68 | 68 | 65 | 63 | 43 |
| 40 | Qatar | 14.2 | 14.2 | 10.5 | 13.2 | 14.4 | 0.6 | 67 | 68 | 74 | 67 | 66 |
| 41 | DRC | 8.0 | 7.9 | 12.6 | 9.7 | 13.0 | 15.9 | 67 | 67 | 66 | 64 | 56 |
| 42 | Indonesia | 10.9 | 12.3 | 11.5 | 10.2 | 9.7 | 11.5 | 66 | 68 | 68 | 63 | 60 |
| 43 | Cameroon | 8.8 | 7.6 | 12.6 | 8.0 | 13.1 | 15.9 | 66 | 65 | 65 | 64 | 60 |
| 44 | Brunei | 15.0 | 14.7 | 10.0 | 10.8 | 14.1 | 1.3 | 66 | 65 | 64 | 64 | 63 |
| 45 | Comoros | 12.7 | 14.0 | 11.2 | 12.4 | 14.2 | 1.1 | 66 | 66 | 63 | 62 | 57 |
| 46 | Tajikistan | 13.8 | 12.6 | 12.3 | 12.9 | 13.4 | 0.6 | 66 | 66 | 65 | 66 | 65 |
| 47 | Kazakhstan | 13.3 | 11.8 | 12.1 | 12.8 | 14.3 | 1.1 | 65 | 65 | 64 | 64 | 64 |
| 48 | Jordan | 12.9 | 14.2 | 10.5 | 12.4 | 12.8 | 2.2 | 65 | 65 | 66 | 64 | 64 |
| 49 | Malaysia | 13.0 | 14.1 | 11.5 | 12.2 | 11.1 | 2.4 | 64 | 66 | 63 | 63 | 62 |
| 50 | Turkey | 13.0 | 11.5 | 11.6 | 13.2 | 11.4 | 3.1 | 64 | 66 | 65 | 69 | 63 |

| Rank | Country | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2024 | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 |
|------|-------------------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 51 | Kenya | 10.3 | 9.2 | 11.4 | 8.0 | 11.5 | 12.4 | 63 | 64 | 63 | 62 | 61 |
| 52 | Tanzania | 9.3 | 10.8 | 10.3 | 8.6 | 8.7 | 14.4 | 62 | 63 | 61 | 58 | 55 |
| 53 | Nepal | 12.1 | 10.4 | 9.5 | 13.2 | 12.3 | 4.4 | 62 | 61 | 64 | 66 | 64 |
| 54 | Kuwait | 13.1 | 13.6 | 9.4 | 12.0 | 12.2 | 0.9 | 61 | 64 | 64 | 63 | 62 |
| 55 | Djibouti | 12.3 | 12.6 | 12.7 | 10.1 | 12.3 | 1.1 | 61 | 60 | 59 | 56 | 56 |
| 56 | Chad | 11.6 | 8.2 | 10.2 | 10.2 | 10.3 | 10.6 | 61 | 58 | 55 | 53 | 56 |
| 57 | UAE | 13.3 | 13.4 | 9.5 | 11.3 | 12.8 | 0.7 | 61 | 62 | 62 | 62 | 60 |
| 58 | Sri Lanka | 12.9 | 9.2 | 10.8 | 11.5 | 9.7 | 5.9 | 60 | 57 | 63 | 62 | 65 |
| 59 | Azerbaijan | 13.2 | 9.9 | 9.6 | 11.9 | 13.6 | 1.7 | 60 | 59 | 60 | 56 | 57 |
| 60 | Palestinian Territories | 13.1 | 13.3 | 9.7 | 10.7 | 12.1 | 0.9 | 60 | 60 | 59 | 58 | 60 |
| 61 | Kyrgyzstan | 13.2 | 10.3 | 11.3 | 10.5 | 12.2 | 1.3 | 59 | 59 | 58 | 58 | 57 |
| 62 | Russian Federation | 12.7 | 7.7 | 10.6 | 12.8 | 12.9 | 1.7 | 58 | 57 | 56 | 57 | 60 |
| 63 | Rwanda | 9.4 | 7.7 | 9.0 | 10.4 | 11.7 | 9.4 | 58 | 57 | 50 | 42 | 42 |
| 64 | Burundi | 7.6 | 7.8 | 9.4 | 9.8 | 9.7 | 12.8 | 57 | 55 | 52 | 48 | 48 |
| 65 | Bahrain | 12.0 | 13.2 | 8.6 | 11.3 | 8.5 | 1.1 | 55 | 55 | 57 | 56 | 55 |
| 66 | Honduras | 7.9 | 4.7 | 12.2 | 7.3 | 9.9 | 12.6 | 55 | 53 | 48 | 46 | 39 |
| 67 | Venezuela | 6.0 | 4.4 | 11.1 | 10.0 | 10.8 | 10.7 | 53 | 56 | 51 | 39 | 42 |
| 68 | Togo | 9.2 | 6.7 | 9.3 | 7.1 | 11.0 | 8.9 | 52 | 49 | 44 | 43 | 41 |
| 69 | Guinea | 10.3 | 7.5 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 10.5 | 7.2 | 52 | 48 | 43 | 47 | 45 |
| 70 | Uganda | 8.1 | 5.0 | 7.4 | 6.7 | 8.8 | 15.9 | 52 | 51 | 48 | 47 | 48 |
| 71 | Angola | 6.8 | 6.7 | 8.1 | 11.5 | 11.4 | 7.2 | 52 | 52 | 51 | 46 | 43 |
| 72 | Lebanon | 11.0 | 10.2 | 7.0 | 6.1 | 6.6 | 7.2 | 48 | 40 | 11 | - | 35 |
| 73 | Gambia | 8.3 | 8.2 | 8.9 | 8.8 | 8.9 | 3.7 | 47 | 44 | 44 | 43 | 43 |
| 74 | South Sudan | 5.7 | 4.4 | 7.0 | 6.3 | 7.6 | 15.6 | 46 | 46 | 43 | 43 | 44 |
| 75 | Belarus | 9.6 | 3.8 | 5.8 | 9.7 | 13.3 | 3.3 | 46 | 43 | 33 | 30 | 28 |
| 76 | Ivory Coast | 12.0 | 6.5 | 8.7 | 5.9 | 8.0 | 3.3 | 44 | 44 | 42 | 42 | 42 |
| 77 | Ukraine | 5.5 | 4.8 | 8.0 | 11.6 | 11.6 | 2.8 | 44 | 37 | 37 | 34 | 33 |
| 78 | Israel | 9.8 | 8.6 | 5.8 | 6.3 | 6.9 | 6.7 | 44 | 38 | 41 | 40 | 38 |

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 01 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Cuba

Brief country details

| Cuba: Population (UN estimate for 2023) | Christians | Chr% |
|---|------------|------|
| 11,291,000 | 6,966,000 | 61.7 |

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



| Cuba: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2024 | 73 | 22 |
| WWL 2023 | 70 | 27 |
| WWL 2022 | 66 | 37 |
| WWL 2021 | 62 | 51 |
| WWL 2020 | 52 | 61 |

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

| Cuba: | |
|---|--|
| Main Persecution engines | Main drivers |
| Dictatorial paranoia | Government officials, Political parties, Ideological pressure groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs |
| Communist and post-Communist oppression | Government officials, Political parties, Ideological pressure groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs |
| Secular intolerance | Government officials, Ideological pressure groups, Political parties |

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

Since 1959 Cuba has been governed by a single party, the Communist Party of Cuba, which seeks to control the Church according to its Communist ideology. The government reacts harshly against opposition voices and demonstrators. When church leaders or Christian activists criticize the regime, they face several forms of systematic hostility such as summons for interrogation, arrest, smear campaigns, mobility restrictions, prison sentences and/or harassment by the government and its sympathizers (usually called "repudiation acts" and might include damage to Christian-owned buildings and physical violence towards individuals). These repressive measures can also include hostility towards family members and the threat of their losing custody of their children.

In addition, with the aim of controlling and reducing the Church's influence, the authorities have been refusing applications for the registration of new churches or do not respond to long-pending applications of certain religious groups, thus forcing many churches to operate illegally and increasing their vulnerability to state action targeting them. The authorities are then likely to impose penalties such as the complete refusal to issue any licenses, the imposition of fines, the confiscation of property, and the demolition and closure of churches (including house-churches).

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Cuba has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)*
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

*Cuba has only signed the ICCPR but not ratified it.

Cuba is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christians are harassed in the workplace and face discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians are arrested for speaking up for their rights (ICCPR Arts. 9 and 19)
- If arrested, Christians experience beatings and pressure to renounce their faith (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 10)
- Christian children are ostracized at school and pressured to abandon their faith (ICCPR Art. 18; CRC Arts. 14 and 24)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **April 2023, Havana:** The Church of Jesús Obrero was targeted by [vandals](#), who broke in and damaged some cables but did not take anything. The Roman Catholic priest, Léster Rafael Zayas Díaz, is known to be an open critic of the Cuban regime (Cibercuba, 15 June 2023). The parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Havana, also under the care of Father Lester, was damaged in strange circumstances in the months of [March](#) (Cuba Cute, 8 March 2023), [June](#) (Cubanos por el mundo, 16 June 2023) and [August](#) (Ciber Cuba, 7 August 2023).
- **April 2023, Camaguey:** The Observatory of Academic Freedom reported the arrest of a 7-year-old girl during school hours and with the complicity of school staff. Her mother was detained too. In March 2022, her mother, the activist Marisol Peñas Cobas, was formally [accused](#) of committing "acts against the normal development of the minor" for "not teaching her daughter to love the revolution". She is currently awaiting trial, after paying bail of two thousand pesos.
- **December 2022, Santiago de Cuba:** The wife of pastor and human rights activist Lorenzo Rosales accused the authorities of harassing him in prison. He was given a seven-year sentence in Boniato prison in Santiago de Cuba. According to his spouse, he is constantly [harassed](#) by jail officials and state security agents (Ciber Cuba, 12 December 2022).

Specific examples of positive developments

- Representatives of both the [national](#) Church (El Pais, 13 November 2021) and at the [international](#) level (Vatican News, 20 September 2021) have publicly expressed their concern over the difficulties faced by Christians in the country.
- The hostility faced by Christians has also drawn the attention of non-religious agencies, both [nationally](#) (Cuban Observatory of Human Rights, 7 June 2022) and [internationally](#) (as in the Global Freedom Index 2022). They have highlighted the violations of religious freedom and related human rights of which faith leaders are victims.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: vandals - <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2023-06-15-u1-e129488-s27061-vuelven-robar-parroquia-linea-policia-esta-ocupada-deteniendo>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: March - <https://www.cubacute.com/2023/03/08/la-delincuencia-en-cuba-no-respeta-ni-a-la-iglesia-se-roban-el-diezmo-en-la-parroquia-del-sagrado-corazon-de-jesus-en-el-vedado/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: June - <https://cubanosporelmundo.com/2023/06/16/roban-iglesia-la-habana/>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: August - https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2023-08-07-u1-e207888-s27061-grupo-jovenes-apedrea-iglesia-habana?utm_medium=buffer&utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=cibercuba_twitter
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: accused - <https://www.martinoticias.com/a/ni%C3%B1a-de-7-a%C3%B1os-citada-a-interrogatorio-porque-su-madre-se-ha-negado-a-que-sea-adoctrinada-en-la-escuela-/356901.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: harassed - <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2022-12-12-u1-e208574-s27061-denuncian-hostigamiento-pastor-presos-carcel-santiago-cuba>
- Specific examples of positive developments: national - <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-11-13/los-obispos-cubanos-expresan-su-preocupacion-por-la-tension-en-la-isla-en-visperas-del-15-n.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: international - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2021-09/church-slovakia-pope-francis-cuba-collection.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: nationally - <https://observacuba.org/estudio-evidencia-cuba-no-respeto-libertad-religiosa/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: internationally - <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2022-12-12-u1-e208574-s27061-denuncian-hostigamiento-pastor-presos-carcel-santiago-cuba>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Cuba

Links for general background information

| Name | Quote Reference | Link | Last accessed on |
|---|--------------------------------|---|------------------|
| Amnesty International 2022/23 Cuba report | AI Cuba 2022 | https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/central-america-and-the-caribbean/cuba/report-cuba/ | 29 June 2023 |
| BBC News Cuba profile - updated 14 February 2023 | BBC Cuba profile | https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19583447 | 29 June 2023 |
| Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries | BTI Cuba Report 2022 | https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/CUB | 29 June 2023 |
| CIA World Factbook Cuba - updated 15 June 2023 | World Factbook Cuba | https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cuba/ | 29 June 2023 |
| Crisis24 Cuba report (Garda World) | Crisis24 Cuba report | https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/cuba | 29 June 2023 |
| Economist Intelligence Unit Cuba profile 2023 | EIU Cuba profile 2023 | https://country.eiu.com/cuba | 29 June 2023 |
| FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries | FSI 2023 Cuba | https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/ | 29 June 2023 |
| Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Cuba not included | Democracy Index 2023 | https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores | |
| Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries | Global Freedom Index 2023 Cuba | https://freedomhouse.org/country/cuba/freedom-world/2023 | 29 June 2023 |
| Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries | Freedom on the Net 2023 Cuba | https://freedomhouse.org/country/cuba/freedom-net/2023 | 28 December 2023 |
| Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries | GIWPS 2021 Cuba profile | https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/cuba/ | 29 June 2023 |
| Girls Not Brides Cuba report | Girls Not Brides Cuba | https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/cuba/ | 29 June 2023 |
| Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Cuba country chapter | HRW 2023 Cuba country chapter | https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/cuba | 29 June 2023 |
| Internet World Stats available in 2023 | IWS 2023 Cuba | https://www.internetworldstats.com/carib.htm#cu | 29 June 2023 |
| RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries | World Press Freedom 2023 Cuba | https://rsf.org/en/cuba | 29 June 2023 |
| Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries | CPI 2022 Cuba | https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/cub | 29 June 2023 |
| UNDP: Human Development Report Cuba | UNDP HDR Cuba | https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/CUB | 29 June 2023 |
| US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Cuba | IRFR 2022 Cuba | https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cuba/ | 29 June 2023 |
| USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL | USCIRF 2023 Cuba CPC | https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Cuba.pdf | 29 June 2023 |
| World Bank Cuba data – 2021 | World Bank Cuba data | https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=CUB | 29 June 2023 |
| World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook - April 2023. Cuba not included | Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 | https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/macro-poverty-outlook/mpo_lac | 29 June 2023 |

Recent history

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

One important change in the Constitution was the re-introduction of the office of President of the Republic, which had been discarded in 1976. In October 2019, Miguel Díaz-Canel was officially [elected](#) to the presidency by the National Assembly (ONU Cuba News, 11 October 2019), having already assumed that position when Raúl Castro handed over power to him in April 2018, thus [ending](#) six decades of rule by the Castro family (Latin American Post, 6 May 2019). As president, he [directs](#) the country's politics, foreign relations and the armed forces (France 24, 13 July 2020).

Also, in October 2019, the position of prime minister was re-introduced for the first time in 43 years. In December 2019, the president nominated Manuel Marrero Cruz as [prime minister](#), a choice which was ratified by the National Assembly (BBC News, 22 December 2020). The prime minister takes charge of the Council of Ministers and manages the day-to-day operations of the Cuban government. Additionally, in April 2021, Raul Castro resigned from the position of Cuban Communist Party Secretary. Party leadership was [handed over](#) to Miguel Díaz-Canel who has stated that he will continue to consult with Raul Castro concerning any strategic planning for the future of the nation (Reuters, 19 April 2021).

The [fluctuations](#) in the relationship with the USA in recent years have also been significant (Council on foreign relations, 27 March 2020). After the attempts by former US-President Obama to restore diplomatic relations with Cuba, former US-President Donald Trump [imposed](#) new restrictive policies (US Department of State, 23 September 2020) and maintained commercial, economic and financial embargos (see below: *Political and legal landscape*). The current US president, Joe Biden, [tightened](#) sanctions against Cuba in July 2021, after the crackdown by Cuban officials against demonstrators in anti-government protests that erupted in the country in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the acute shortages of food, medicine and fuel, and widespread violations of human rights (Los Angeles Times, 18 October 2021). However, in May 2022, the Biden administration [reversed](#) some of the previous measures and re-engaged on some issues, notably migration (Wola, 16 December 2022).

In [September 2022](#), an epidemic of dengue fever was confirmed which, together with the ravages of Hurricane Ian, worsened the social and humanitarian crisis that was already plaguing the country (Observatorio Cubano de Conflictos, 3 October 2022).

In 2023, Cuba was once again the victim of floods in various provinces, a situation that caused considerable material damage, exacerbating the shortages of medicines, food and electricity. Faced with this situation, Caritas Cuba [called](#) for solidarity (Vatican News, 13 June 2023). Additionally, the fuel shortage crisis caused the suspension of the Workers' Day parade on 1 May 2023 in the Plaza de la Revolución. In 2020 and 2021 the parade had been canceled due to COVID-19, however, this is the first time since the revolution that it had been canceled for [economic reasons](#) (BBC News, 30 April 2023).

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

Church, the socio-economic situation of the country and the strengthening of values in society (Presidencia Cuba, 26 April 2023).

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

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

Political and legal landscape

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

- The New Penal Code (2022) entered into force on 1 December 2022. This replaces the penal code enacted in 1987 and is much more restrictive. According to Amnesty International (AI, 2 December 2022) [five "alarming aspects"](#) of this new legislation are:
 - Many provisions of the criminal code that have been used to silence and imprison activists for decades remain;
 - The new Penal Code penalizes anyone who “endangers the constitutional order and the normal functioning” of the government;
 - It criminalizes receipt of funding, further stifling independent journalists and activists;
 - It severely limits freedom of expression online;
 - The new penal code retains the death penalty for 23 different crimes.
- The Family Code. The [text](#) was submitted for popular consultation (Official Gazette, 12 January 2022), which was completed on 30 April 2022. [Version 25](#), which includes the modifications derived from the popular consultation (Parlamento Cubano, July 2022), was discussed in parliament in July and subsequently submitted to a referendum on 25 September 2022. The most significant [changes](#) concerned the areas of marriage, filiation and surrogacy, among others (Reuter, 14 November 2022). See further details below in: *Religious landscape*. The referendum approved the proposed changes (with around 66% of the votes). However, in the months prior to the referendum, the government launched an [intensive campaign](#) encouraging support for the changes while at the same time [criticizing](#) those who tried to campaign against the approval of the reform (Swissinfo, 20 September 2022).
- The [Law of Expropriation for Reasons of Public Utility or Social Interest](#) (2023) gives the authorities the right to take control of any real estate or land when required for securing internal order or for national defense and security. In this context, church buildings or property could be confiscated for arbitrary reasons (Gaceta Oficial, 29 May 2023)

- The Law N° 162, the [Social Communication Law](#) (2023), which serves to prevent any content being shared in physical or digital public spaces that might subvert the constitutional order, destabilize the socialist State of Law and social justice or encourage hostility towards the nation. The law includes penalties for defaming, slandering or insulting persons, organs, agencies and entities of the State, and any national political and social organizations (Presidencia, 25 May 2023).
- The [Military Criminal Code](#) (2023) sets out that anyone receiving an order from the armed forces and expressly refuses to comply with it, or anyone attempting to evade military service, may be punished with a prison sentence (Gaceta Oficial, 11 August 2023).

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

This opposition came to a head in July 2021, when citizens (especially young adults) took to the streets in a series of peaceful protests. These were the biggest anti-government demonstrations in decades. During the series of protests in 2021, the state authorities [arbitrarily detained](#) 1,397 protestors, including 15 minors (Radio Television Martí, 9 February 2022). Demonstrators and relatives of protesters and political detainees were [harassed](#) due to their part in publicizing the human rights violations being perpetrated by the authorities (ICHR, 16 February 2022). Government repression also targeted those who participated in the Civic March for Change planned for November 2021. The government measures [included](#) the blocking of Internet services, arbitrary arrests and using state security agents and government supporters to prevent protesters from leaving their homes (BBC News, 15 November 2021). The repressive measures were not only evident on the day of the march, but also months in advance.

The total collapse of the National Energy System that left the entire country without electricity for several hours served as a trigger for hundreds of citizens to gather for mass demonstrations in the main cities of the country on the days following 29 September 2022. The regime [reacted violently](#), making use of police and paramilitary forces against the protesters as was the case previously in July and November 2021 (Observatorio Cubano de Derechos Humanos, 30 September 2022). According to Amnesty International, 26 [demonstrators](#) were arrested (AI, 5 October 2022). One of the latest demonstrations was held in May 2023 in [Caimanera](#), where the people went into the streets to demand better living conditions. Once again, the security forces responded with violence (France24, 7 May 2023).

According to the Cuban Conflict Observatory, in September 2023 alone, [465](#) public protests were recorded, which represents an increase of 27.5% compared to those registered in the same month in 2022 (364 public protests). Protesters were most active in Havana with 167, followed by Holguín with 23 and Camaguey with 22. The September protests focusing on economic and social rights exceeded those dealing with civil and political rights by almost two thirds. There were protests about the crisis in public services (especially health, water, electricity and educa-

tion), the banking system and food insecurity (Observatorio Cubano de Conflictos, 2 October 2023). As of September 2023, there were 1,052 [political prisoners](#) on the island (Prisoners Defenders, 13 November 2023).

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

The COVID-19 crisis also made it possible for the violation of human rights to worsen and be justified by the authorities on grounds of public health. These repressive activities [continued long after](#) the actual street demonstrations; even in July 2022 there were still Christians (and others) being singled out and harassed for having gone out to march against the government in July 2021 (HRW, 11 July 2022).

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

Regarding the relationship between the USA and Cuba, despite the progress made between Barack Obama (USA) and Raul Castro (Cuba) in the past, the current situation has remained tense. Prior to elections in November 2020, US-President Trump continued the implementation of sanctions against Cuba. These [sanctions](#) included travel, trade and financial restrictions (FAS, 19 August 2020), as well as efforts to stop the export of Venezuelan oil to Cuba. The USA also added Cuba to a [blacklist](#) of countries not fully cooperating with counterterrorism measures (US State Department, 13 May 2020) and in January 2021 [designated](#) Cuba as a 'State Sponsor of Terrorism' for repeatedly supporting acts of international terrorism by granting safe haven to terrorists (US State Department, 12 January 2021). President Biden and other US officials expressed solidarity with the Cuban protesters and criticized the government's repression. In July and August 2021, the US Treasury Department [imposed](#) four rounds of targeted financial sanctions on Cuban security entities and officials involved in actions to suppress the protests. In November 2021 and January 2022, the US State Department imposed visa restrictions on officials implicated in suppressing a planned civic march and those involved in the imprisonment of participants in the protests on 11 July 2021 (CRS, 13 May 2022).

However, in May 2022, the Biden administration [relaxed](#) some of its policies towards the island, although none of these definitively reversed the blockade imposed by the Trump administration (BBC News, 17 May 2022). The [new US policy](#) included the following (Wola, 16 December 2022):

- i. The authorization of scheduled and charter flights between the USA and locations beyond Havana. It also reinstated group people-to-people and other categories of educational travel, as well as certain travel related to professional meetings and professional research.
- ii. The removal of the \$1,000 limit on family remittances allowed per quarter per sender-receiver pair and authorized donative (non-family) money transfers. Allowing remittances to go to non-family members could expand their use for entrepreneurs and for humanitarian assistance.

- iii. The resumption of the “Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program (CFRP)” to allow eligible US citizens to apply for their Cuban relatives to travel to the USA without waiting for their migrant visas to become available.
- iv. The facilitation of access to e-commerce (access to the Internet as well as to cloud technology, application programming interfaces, e-commerce platforms, and electronic payments) and business engagement and work to expand entrepreneurs’ access to microfinance and training.

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

Regarding the relationship between Cuba and other countries, there has been a notable rapprochement with Russia. They recently [signed](#) a commercial and economic cooperation agreement (valid until 2030) that plans to promote the growth of bilateral trade and investment (Prensa Latina, 2 November 2023). A visit by the president of Iran in June 2023 was also significant: Both the Iranian and Cuban governments are currently facing US sanctions. During the visit, representatives of both governments signed [cooperation agreements](#) in foreign policy, telecommunications and justice. (Swissinfo, 15 June 2023).

La Habana was chosen as the [location](#) for the peace talks between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army/ELN (APNews,17 May 2023).

Gender perspective

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

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

Religious landscape

| Cuba: Religious context | Number of adherents | % |
|---|---------------------|------|
| Christians | 6,966,000 | 61.7 |
| Muslim | 9,700 | 0.1 |
| Hindu | 24,400 | 0.2 |
| Buddhist | 6,400 | 0.1 |
| Ethno-religionist | 0 | 0.0 |
| Jewish | 810 | 0.0 |
| Bahai | 1,300 | 0.0 |
| Atheist | 467,000 | 4.1 |
| Agnostic | 1,869,000 | 16.6 |
| Other | 1,946,760 | 17.2 |
| <i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i> | | |

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

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

One of the departments that oversee the implementation of regulations for religious entities is the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA), which was created in 1985 and is part of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba. According to the government, this office [works](#) to achieve the dissemination, understanding and implementation of the policy towards religious beliefs, believers, their institutions, organizations and fraternal associations (Permanent Mission of Cuba, November 2020). In practice, ORA is used to control churches and other religious institutions in the country.

Since 1941, the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) has acted as a bridge between the government and around 28 church denominations. It [describes](#) itself as a non-governmental, Christian-inspired entity whose vision is to be an ecumenical fellowship of churches (CCC, 2022). Autho-

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

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

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

Since 2021, Catholic priests (and other Catholics) have begun to speak publicly about human rights violations and the Cuban crisis in general. Leaders from the Evangelical churches have also been speaking out more boldly. In general, church leaders have stood in support of the general population, advocating for the release of political prisoners and [denouncing](#) the abuses perpetrated against detainees (LopezDoriga, 23 April 2023). They have also been demanding guarantees for the right to peaceful protest, the respect of civil rights, and also made it plain in 2021 that they would [support](#) protesters in the marches called for November 2021, although these did not take place as planned (Cibercuba, 7 October 2021). Evangelical congregations have also been gathering for times of [prayer](#) in the streets (Observatorio Cubano, 1 October 2021).

While carrying out such activities as listed above, church leaders and their families have faced various forms of hostility. According to the [USCIRF Constitutional Reform report](#), 93% of those surveyed claimed to be suffering from government repression and all of them knew of Christians who had faced searches, surveillance and fled the country. The most common acts of government hostility were the use of threats, judicial summons and arrests. A common form of pressure was to isolate dissident religious leaders from their congregations (USCIRF, July 2022). Other forms of persecution used to target church leaders and their communities were:

- Threats of dismissal, slander, defamation, travel restrictions, death threats, home-raids, '[acts of repudiation](#)' (ADN Cuba, 15 November 2021)
- [Arbitrary arrests](#) (Radio Televisión Marti, 15 November 2021) According to CSW, the government continued to [detain](#) religious leaders from multiple faith communities and handed down harsh prison sentences for participating in July 2021 protests. (US State Department, May 2023). Many of the church leaders and other Christians detained in past reporting periods remain in jail, without due process and with no expectation of being released any time soon.
- [Expulsions](#) from the country (The Washington Times, 3 August 2022), preventing church leaders from carrying out Christian activities, refusal to [renew](#) church leaders' residence permits (Vida Nueva Digital, 30 September 2022) and hindering them from [leaving](#) the country to make visits abroad (Cubagnet, 6 July 2023).
- Unjustified [police citations](#) (Cibercuba, 29 March 2023) and [fines](#) (Aciprensa, 21 October 2022).
- [Surveillance](#) (Cibercuba, 18 November 2021).
- The Cuban police have also used the method of attacking the livelihoods of the pastors and their families to make them resign.
- Church leaders have had to [stop publishing](#) anything criticizing the government (Cuba Trendings, 6 April 2021).
- Christian leaders have been [denied entry](#) to hospitals, hindering religious assistance to the sick (Facebook, 3 October 2021).

According to church leaders and former inmates, authorities continued to [arbitrarily deny prisoners](#), including political prisoners, pastoral visits and the ability to meet with other prisoners for worship, prayer, and study. CSW noted that, on multiple occasions, prison authorities denied imprisoned Pastor Rosales Fajardo permission to participate in religious ceremonies within the prison (US State Department, IRFR 2022 Cuba),

Several cases of church [vandalism](#) were recorded (ADNCuba, 5 February 2023). Church leaders suspect that these are faked robberies intended to intimidate critical clergy.

In some cases, church buildings have continued to be targeted by the authorities and regime sympathizers, including threats of forced closure, [vandalism](#) (Facebook, 12 October 2021) and demolition, especially in the case of [non-registered churches](#) (Panam Post, 2 August 2022). The new expropriation law also poses a risk to the permanence of places of worship.

Applications for registration sent in by many church communities have been rejected by the authorities which has led to those groups being regarded as criminals in their neighborhoods. State action has also [targeted](#) some legally registered churches as well (El Debate, 2 August

2022). According to CSW, many religious groups continued to state their [lack of legal registration](#) impeded their ability to practice their religion. The report also mentioned that the housing authority informed a pastor of another unregistered church, of an order for the immediate confiscation of the property where his congregation met. While authorities did not seize the property, the confiscation order remained in effect through year's end (US State Department, IRFR 2022 Cuba).

Citing the organization Outreach Aid to the Americas, the US State Department mentioned that faith organizations were being charged [high utility rates](#). While most non-state entities received subsidies to offset these costs, religious associations reportedly did not receive this benefit (US State Department, IRFR 2022 Cuba).

Some prayer events had to be [canceled](#) after severe threats were issued by the Cuban government (CSW, 27 April 2022). On other occasions, cultural events linked to church activities were [also](#) arbitrarily canceled (Diócesis de Santa Clara, 22 May 2023). On occasions, processions were also [prohibited](#) by the authorities (Cubanos por el Mundo, September 2023).

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

The new Family Code also has the [potential](#) to strengthen the ability of the government to force church leaders and others into compliance. Article 191 gives the government the right to remove children from their homes if their parents fail to fulfil a list of responsibilities detailed in Article 138 (ñ). These include the duties to instil in their children 'love for the Homeland, respect of its symbols, and respect for the authorities'. In 2022, CSW noted a significant increase in reported ForB cases which included government threats to remove custodial rights from parents.

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

Enrollment in state schools is mandatory. The rights of Christian parents to educate their children according to their religious convictions is [seriously limited](#) since regime ideology and the idolization of Fidel Castro occurs mainly through the textbooks used in state schools (Facebook, 10 January 2022). There are also complaints of the use of children in the regime's electoral campaigns (OLA, 25 March 2023). The case of Pastor Rigal, sentenced to two years in prison for [homeschooling](#) (Assist News Service, 24 April 2019), has served as a warning to other parents trying to avoid such state indoctrination of their children. In the WWL 2024 reporting

period, a mother and a girl were [questioned](#) at a police station because the mother was refusing to allow the child to be indoctrinated at school (Radio Televisión Martí, 13 April 2023). In general, parents who do not accept the indoctrination of their children are threatened with losing custody of their children.

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

A referendum was held on 25 September 2022 to approve amendments to the Family Code of the Cuban Constitution. The referendum passed, thus legalizing a range of demands put forward by pressure groups involving sexuality, marriage and adoption. The new code also permits the removal of children from their homes if their parents fail to fulfill a list of criteria detailed in Article 138, such as a love of the Homeland, respect for its symbols, and respect for the authorities. These are just some of the aspects that have concerned various Christian denominations in Cuba. During the approval process, pastors who were vocal against the new code [faced harassment](#) (Radio Television Martí, 11 February 2022) and church services were [disrupted](#) by militant activists (Evangelico Digital, 8 June 2022). Pressure groups also used social media to [insult](#) and/or minimize faith-based views (Cuba trendings, 7 June 2022).

In general, during the WWL 2024 reporting period, the repression of the Cuban Church continued in a highly visible manner with the Church being falsely accused of instigating protests against the government, especially those of 2021.

Gender perspective

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

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

Economic landscape

According to UNDP Human Development Report Cuba:

- **Gross national income (GNI) per capita (2021):** 7,879
- **GNI per capita for women:** 5,103
- **GNI per capita for men:** 10,693
- **Inequality in income:** Data is not available
- **Multidimensional Poverty Index:** 0.0026887

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the 2023-2024 growth projections in Cuba, will have an increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 1.8% in 2023 and 1.7% in 2024. According to the [document](#), between June 2022 and June 2023, inflation in Cuba tended to accelerate, with an increase of 16.5 percentage points. (ECLAC, 2023). According to the Circle of Latin American Studies, Cuba's GDP grew by 2% in 2022, half of what was forecast. This performance was negatively influenced by the [slow recovery](#) of international tourism, the low levels of exports, the drop in imports, and the persistent problems with the supply of energy, which have affected the production of goods and commercial services (CESLA, June 2023).

According to the Minister of Economy and Planning, Alejandro Gil Fernández, inflation will [exceed](#) 40% in 2023, becoming the "most complex" economic problem facing the island. The price index increased 70% in 2021 and 40% in 2022 (Swiss info, 25 May, 2023), while, according to the National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI), in September 2023, the [consumer price index](#) (CPI) was located at 330.31 with respect to the base (2010), the monthly variation is 1.60%, the accumulated variation is 22.32% and an interannual variation is 37.67% (ONEI, September 2023). The economic crisis has hit all Cubans. In this context, the government's difficulties in producing and importing all necessary goods has given rise to a growing black market, with high prices in many cases. The government [recognizes the seriousness](#) of the fuel shortages and its impact on the economy, but blames the situation on the US sanctions. These affect not only food and medicine imports but also public transportation (El País, 29 September 2023). Given the limitations of public transport, educational centers are [replacing](#) many face-to-face classes with virtual ones online (Los Angeles Times, 24 April 2023).

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

The economic crisis has compelled the Communist Party to restructure its national economic plan. Thus the Ministry of Economy and Planning [launched](#) a National Plan for Economic and Social Development 2030, which includes strategies for gender issues, the reduction of inequali-

ties, economic growth, environmental sustainability and zero hunger (MEP, 2022). In addition, the Cuban government has implemented a strategy called "[Task Ordering](#)" which aims to "make the economy more productive and efficient" (BBC News, 29 January 2021). Usually, two currencies have been in circulation in Cuba - the peso and the convertible peso (CUC). The CUC has now been eliminated in order to achieve monetary and exchange unification. Another modification has to do with the gradual elimination of subsidies and gratuities, which have been causing variations in the prices of products and services, as well as in aid to the most vulnerable groups of the population. Part of this planned reform includes allowing more than 2000 private marketing activities to become legal. The number of [limited activities](#) in 2021 was only 124 (MTSS, 10 February 2021). Another measure has to do with the opening of state stores for buying basic supplies. Unlike other stores on the island, purchases at these stores are carried out via a card linked to a Cuban bank with deposits in foreign currency or with a debit or international credit card (excluding US ones).

Recently, the Central Bank of Cuba issued [resolution 111/2023](#), through which limits are established for cash collections and payments in national currency. A maximum [limit](#) of five thousand Cuban pesos per transaction is imposed for cash collections and payments, seeking to promote banking and the use of electronic payment channels, instead of the use of cash (France 24, 3 August 2023).

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

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

The small amounts of support that local churches receive through foreign donations are constantly monitored and can be a reason for being fined by the authorities. Attempts by the government to [increase banking](#) use or the use of electronic payment channels make monitoring more constant (Bloomberg, 7 August 2023). Reports from in-country sources have revealed that non-monetary donations made to churches have at times been confiscated and resold by the government. Also, as a way of reprisal against Christian business owners (mostly pastors), their businesses have been arbitrarily fined or closed down for allegedly not being included in the 124 activities legally forbidden or as an economic reprisal to their support to demonstrators. In addition, in the past it was reported that some Protestant churches in Santiago de Cuba were [not able to acquire](#) the funds needed for staff and church activities due to their accounts being frozen by the Central Bank of Cuba (Cuba en Miami, 25 October 2020). It was thus very difficult for some churches to offer humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable when they themselves were

struggling to get minimum funds to survive.

Gender perspective

Women do not experience discrimination in relation to inheritance (Civil Code, Article 514) and girls typically have equal access to education as boys. Women and girls remain financially disadvantaged however, due to the high child marriage rate for Cuban girls, and fewer employment opportunities (Girls Not Brides Cuba). The female labor force participation rate is 41.3%, compared to 68.3% for men, in part due to societal norms which place women in the domestic sphere ([World Bank, Gender Data Portal 2023](#)).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the the World Factbook Cuba:

- **Main ethnic groups:** White 64.1%, Mulatto or mixed 26.6%, Black 9.3% (2012 est.)
- **Main language:** Spanish
- **Urban population:** 77.5% of total population (2023)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.7% (% ages 15 and older)
- **Population below poverty line:** NA

According to World Bank Cuba data:

- **Education:** The school enrollment for pre-primary (2021) is 100%; for primary (2021) is 101% and for secondary (2021) 89%. The duration of compulsory education is 9 years.
- **Unemployment (modeled ILO estimate):** 1.4% (2022)
- **Gender Parity Index:** 1% (2021). This refers to the ratio of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.

According to the UNDP Human Development Report Cuba:

- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** Cuba's HDI value for 2021 is 0.764, which put the country in the high human development category, positioning it at 83 out of 191 countries and territories. Between 1990 and 2021, Cuba's HDI value increased by 12.4%.
- **Life expectancy:** Between 1990 and 2021, Cuba's life expectancy at birth decreased by 0.4 years (78.8 at 2019).
- **Gender inequality:** (I.e. the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in the three GII dimensions.) Cuba has a GII value of 0.303, ranking it 73 out of 170 countries in the 2021 index.

Protests against shortages

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Cuban citizens were already facing great difficulties obtaining sufficient income to survive on, but the introduction of lockdown measures, the closing of borders and the latest economic reforms have all impacted the economy, caused widespread poverty and created shortages in basic goods, medicines and services. In addition, there are continual [power-cuts](#) (Infobae, 2 October 2023) and [food shortages](#) (Peoples World, 16 August 2023). Parallel to this, there is an [ongoing housing crisis](#) that has forced several families to share

a single small house (Ap News, 18 October 2023). Many Cubans have no running water available and have to stand in long [queues](#) for water, food, medicines and fuel (CNN, 1 May 2023). According to the Cuban Observatory of Human Rights, placing the poverty threshold at \$1.90 per day per person, for a household of 3 members and according to the total income reported per household, [88%](#) of Cubans live below the poverty threshold (OCDH, September 2023).

The scale of the crisis caused anger to erupt among the general public and in July 2021, for the first time in decades, Cubans [staged protests](#) against the government (BBC News, 12 July 2021). Further large-scale peaceful demonstrations were suppressed by the government, as occurred in September 2022 (see above: *Political and legal landscape*) and [in May 2023](#) (CNN, 8 May 2023).

Mass emigration

Mass emigration has become a [significant problem](#) (El Pais, 14 September 2022), and in the short term its impact on social and economic life will worsen with the departure of almost a generation of young people of working age and an elderly population that depends on them for the pension system to function. The crisis in the country has reached such magnitude that it has caused what some call "the [biggest exodus](#)" since Fidel Castro came to power in the country (NY Times, 12 December 2022). The US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) [reported](#) that in fiscal year 2023, which ended in September, 200,287 had tried to enter US territory illegally (US Customs and Borders Protection, 14 October 2023).

The mass exodus in the last two years is equivalent to almost [4%](#) of Cuba's total population (Infobae, 25 October 2023). Thus, although the situation in Cuba has long been critical, the current situation is evidently making life on the island unsustainable for many (due to the shortages, lack of opportunities, restrictions on fundamental freedoms and government repression). Especially young people lack future perspectives. Christian leaders have spoken publicly about the situation and have drawn attention to the problems of unemployment, migration, poverty and human rights violations. The Bishops of Cuba have especially warned about the lack of food and medicine, as the most [serious crisis](#) in recent decades (El Debate, 18 August 2023).

The crisis - including the problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic - has increased the levels of [humanitarian aid](#) being sent by various church organizations from around the world (Vatican News, 26 October 2021). The risk that civil society organizations with foreign contacts face deserves a mention, especially in the context of the New Penal Code. Article 143 of the New Penal Code [states](#) (Cuba Debate, 2022):

- “Whoever, by himself or on behalf of non-governmental organizations, international institutions, associative forms or any natural or legal person of the country or of a foreign State, supports, encourages, finances, provides, receives or has in his possession funds, material or financial resources, with the purpose of defraying activities against the State and its constitutional order, incurs a sanction of deprivation of liberty from four to ten years.”

In other words, the Cuban government could imprison those who receive foreign funding to support perceived anti-government activities, including any organization that the state considers to be too vocal in criticism, even when that criticism is not of a political or ideological nature. Faith-based organizations are thus also in danger of being perceived as dissidents.

During the COVID-19 crisis, many church leaders organized the distribution of basic supplies and [emergency aid](#) to the poorest communities (Lutheran World Federation, 26 February 2021) despite the many [impediments](#) placed in their way by the government (Periodico Cubano, 19 August 2020).

In the WWL 2024 reporting period, various government measures continued to stifle the humanitarian operations carried out by faith-based organizations. The US State Department stated in its International Religious Freedom Report 2022 that despite increased shortages of food, medicine, and other essential items, authorities greatly restricted many religious organizations' ability to receive and distribute humanitarian assistance: "While the government allowed Caritas to continue to assist the needy, it did not allow many smaller religious groups and charities that were not part of the government-recognized CCC to provide aid. Other religious leaders also said the government continued to restrict their ability to receive donations from overseas." According to the Patmos Institute [reporting](#) on 24 April 2023: "Any humanitarian aid or resources that are shared in the community must always go through the filter of government control (...) the Government identifies community influence as a capital of political influence that it does not wish to share. with anyone, regardless of whether it is the community that suffers the consequences."

Gender perspective

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

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Cuba):

- **Internet usage:** 58.0% penetration rate - survey date: March 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 1% penetration rate - survey date: March 2022

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

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

According to World Bank Cuba data:

- **Mobile phone (cellular) subscriptions:** 68 per 100 people (2022).

According to Freedom on the Net 2023 Cuba:

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

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

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

According to Reporters Without Borders (World Press Freedom 2023 Cuba):

- Cuba remains the worst country for press freedom in Latin America, scoring 29 points and located at 172/180 position. Television, radio, and newspapers are all closely monitored by the government. The Constitution prohibits privately owned press. Journalists who do not follow the Cuban Communist Party line are arrested, arbitrarily detained, threatened with imprisonment, persecution and harassment, illegal raids on homes, confiscation and destruction of equipment. . The authorities also control foreign journalists' coverage by granting accreditation selectively, and by expelling those considered "too negative" about the government. Access to the Internet

is still mostly controlled by the state. Bloggers and journalists can express themselves online but do so at their own risk.

Norms such as [Decree Law 389](#) (Havana Times, 25 November 2020) legalize electronic surveillance without court authorization. [Decree Law 370](#) (Civil Rights Defenders, 18 June 2020) penalizes the dissemination of information contrary to “social interest”, “morals” and “good customs” on social media, restricting freedom of expression. [Decree Law 35](#) (Official Gazette, 92, August 17, 2021) deals with cybersecurity. Several human rights organizations and independent media have denounced the violation of fundamental human rights caused by the application of this law which is used to interrogate, threaten, confiscate equipment (especially that of journalists) and to impose exorbitant fines on those who “spread information contrary to the common good, morals, decency, and integrity through public data transmission networks”. Also, it imposes broad obligations on service providers to censor online content without judicial oversight or transparency measures (Freedom on the Net 2022).

According to CSW reporting in February 2022:

- “This new cybersecurity law [criminalizes](#) any online criticism of the government, as well as incitement to ‘public disturbances’ which is the term the government uses to describe the peaceful protest marches that took place across the island on 11 July [2021]. According to Legal Decree 35, any dissemination of ‘content that violates the constitutional, social and economic precepts of the State, that incites mobilizations or other acts that affect public order; that spreads messages that justify violence, accidents of any kind that affect the privacy and dignity of people’ will now be considered cyberterrorism. This gives the government sweeping and subjective powers to crack down on freedom of expression and related rights like FoRB.”

The [New Penal Code](#) (Amnesty International, 2 December 2022) criminalizes freedom of speech - affecting independent journalists and activists - and penalizes anyone who “endangers the constitutional order and the normal functioning of the government”. It also retains the death penalty.

In June 2023, the National Assembly approved a [new Social Communication Law](#), which aims to regulate the press and repress freedom of expression that goes against the interests of the Communist Party. Among other things, it stipulates that the media are “socialist property of all the people or of political, mass, and social organizations, and cannot be the object of any other type of property.” It also indicates that the press cannot be used with the objective of subverting the constitutional order and destabilizing the socialist state, which, according to some analysts, was already happening in practice (Latam Journalism Review, 27 June 2023). The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights - IACHR expressed its [concern](#) over the approval of the Social Communication Law in Cuba, which contravenes international human rights standards and intensifies censorship (IACHR, June 2023). According to the IACHR, the new regulations limit the creation and dissemination of content – both online and offline – that is protected by international human rights law, through the imposition of arbitrary prior conditions.

In addition to the legal framework, in practice the government [controls](#) the Cuban Telecommunications Company, as well as the infrastructure and the sector in general, enabling censorship practices (Yucabite, 18 June 2022) such as the deliberate slowing down of connection speeds, the interception of calls and private messaging via SMS, the confiscation of equipment such as computers and mobile phones, expulsion from state institutions, and fines for publishing content on social media. These are all government instruments for censoring opinions and discussions which the regime classes as dissent. In the protests that erupted at the end of September 2022, the government again applied strategies such as [Internet cut-offs](#) in order to silence and carry out arbitrary arrests of protesters. It is common practice for the authorities to restrict Internet access in difficult political situations or during protests (Amnesty International, 5 October 2022). According to NGO Access Now, in 2022 in Latin America, the Cuban government was the one that [cut access to the Internet most often](#) (Access Now, February 2023).

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

Security situation

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

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

In addition to abuses carried out by the security forces, there are also anonymous complaints used by the "State Security Organs" (OSE) to intimidate those who criticize or oppose regime policies. Such intimidation includes the practice of holding potential regime opponents for an hour or more in hermetically sealed vehicles, often in the sun. This method is known as "[patrulla-horno](#)" (Connectas, June 2021). At the time of the planned November demonstrations, the government stepped up the frequency of house arrests, the blocking of access to regime opponents' homes, 'acts of repudiation', interrogation, threats, dismissal of opposition supporters from their workplaces, threats of physical harm and kidnappings. The Cuban Observatory for Human Rights - OCDH identified in March 2023, [363 repressive actions](#), against journalists, activists and citizens; 64 of these actions occurred in the context of the elections held on March 26 to renew the National Assembly of People's Power (unicameral Parliament) (Infobae, 5 April 2023). In May 2023 alone, the organization reported 354 repressive actions, of which 83 were some form of arbitrary detention and the other 271 abuses included 94 sieges, police summonses, harassment of activists, threats and fines (OCDH, 5 June 2023).

Christian leaders who are vocal against the government injustices are among those suffering from government repression. Several priests and pastors have faced [threats](#) (OLA, 29 March 2023), '[acts of repudiation](#)' (Cuba Net, 15 November 2021), [surveillance](#) (Aciprensa, 16 November 2021), arbitrary arrest, [physical attacks](#) by security officers (Marti Noticias, 11 February 2022), and [abuse](#) as political prisoners (Ciber Cuba, 12 December 2022), [threats of being charged](#) with various crimes (Facebook post, 13 November 2021), home-searches and confiscation of goods, vandalism of church buildings and houses, and even [forced displacement](#) (CSW, 3 March 2022). Not only church leaders, but also those who work with them or with Christian networks and media critical of the regime have also been [harassed](#) (Vida Cristiana, 4 November 2021). Churches have also become more frequently targeted for robberies. In some cases, religious leaders suspect that what appear to be thefts are just covert acts of intimidation. Where church leaders advocate for more freedom for the people and the improvement of their social conditions, they will be treated as opposition voices. In general, Christians face similar hostilities when they intend to share information with foreign organizations or Christian ministries about the situation of persecution they are experiencing, making it even more difficult to assist them and help them in publicizing the violation of their rights.

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

Gender perspective

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

pared to 23 for men.

Trends analysis

1) Citizens want the government to give up its failing Communist policies

Citizen rejection of the totalitarian Communist regime is growing more visible and braver and tends to manifest itself through continuous protests to which the regime reacts with hostility. However, the government continues to defend its failing Communist policies, without considering the direct impact these have on the humanitarian crisis in the country. Thus, serious human rights violations persist against any sign of an opposition voice, and attempts are being made to leave no space even for faith communities that reject the social-communist postulates that have been imposed by force in the country.

2) Harsh consequences for dissenting voices

Although the largest peaceful protests against the country took place in July and November 2021, government reprisals against those who participated in the marches, against those who expressed their support, and against those who denounced the abuses committed during and after those events, have not stopped, despite the fact that many civil society actors - including church leaders - have constantly denounce this in public. Through arbitrary arrests, 'acts of repudiation', smear campaigns, and other hostilities, repression remains at a high level against those directly involved and against family members as well.

3) The regime tries to silence the Church through systematic oppression

The Communist dictatorship has not changed its stance towards the Church, especially in 2022. Systematic oppression occurs mainly through the harassment of church leaders and their most active members. The main objectives of this type of action continues to be: i) silencing all opposition, ii) prevention of the growth of Christianity in the country, iii) prevention of public condemnation of serious human rights violations, iv) prevention of faith-based humanitarian work of the Church and its promotion of a culture in defense of the common good.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: elected - <https://oncubanews.com/en/cuba/diaz-canel-confirmed-as-president-of-cuba/>
- Recent history: ending - <https://latinamericanpost.com/27912-cuba-balance-of-diaz-canels-first-year-in-the-presidency>
- Recent history: directs - <https://www.france24.com/en/20190713-key-things-know-about-cubas-government-reforms>
- Recent history: prime minister - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-50881820>
- Recent history: handed over - <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/cuban-president-diaz-canel-made-communist-party-leader-ending-castro-era-2021-04-19/>
- Recent history: fluctuations - <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-cuba-relations>
- Recent history: imposed - <https://www.state.gov/cuba-sanctions/>
- Recent history: tightened - <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-10-18/biden-leaves-cuba-in-the-deep-freeze>
- Recent history: reversed - <https://www.wola.org/analysis/us-cuba-relations-old-new-should-come-next/>
- Recent history: September 2022 - <https://observatoriocubano.com/2022/10/03/cuba-364-protestas-en-septiembre-cuba-mas-de-4-millones-de-cubanos-rechazan-el-socialismo-en-urnas-y-miles-en-las-calles/>

- Recent history: called - <https://www.vaticannews.va/es/iglesia/news/2023-06/caritas-cuba-lanza-un-sos-por-las-inundaciones.html>
- Recent history: economic reasons - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-65442845>
- Recent history: received - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-06/pope-francis-private-audience-cuba-president-diaz-canel.html>
- Recent history: representatives - <https://www.presidencia.gob.cu/es/noticias/recibio-diaz-canel-a-representantes-de-la-conferencia-de-obispos-catolicos-de-cuba/>
- Recent history: re-elected - <https://cubaminrex.cu/en/cuba-elected-un-human-rights-council>
- Political and legal landscape: five "alarming aspects" - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/cuba-el-nuevo-codigo-penal-presenta-un-panorama-aterrador-para-2023-y-anos-posteriores/>
- Political and legal landscape: text - <https://www.wola.org/analysis/5-concerns-about-cuba-penal-code/>
- Political and legal landscape: Version 25 - https://www.parlamentocubano.gob.cu/sites/default/files/documento/2022-07/CF%20V%2025-140622%20VF%20%20Para%20ANPP%20%282%29_0.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: changes - <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/cuba-welcomes-gay-rights-progressive-family-code-takes-hold-2022-11-14/>
- Political and legal landscape: intensive campaign - <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-62986659>
- Political and legal landscape: criticizing - https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/cuba-referendo_el-primer-ministro-cubano-critic%C3%B3-campa%C3%B1as-contra-el-c%C3%B3digo-de-las-familias/47916204
- Political and legal landscape: Law of Expropriation for Reasons of Public Utility or Social Interest - https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.cu/sites/default/files/goc-2023-o46_0.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: Social Communication Law - <https://www.presidencia.gob.cu/es/noticias/cuba-ya-tiene-su-ley-de-comunicacion-social/>
- Political and legal landscape: Military Criminal Code - <https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.cu/sites/default/files/goc-2023-o75.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: arbitrarily detained - <https://www.radiotelevisionmarti.com/a/m%C3%A1s-de-700-personas-siguen-en-prisi%C3%B3n-en-cuba-por-manifestarse-el-11-j-entre-ellas-15-menores-de-edad/313128.html>
- Political and legal landscape: harassed - <https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2022/031.asp>
- Political and legal landscape: included - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-59289966>
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- Political and legal landscape: demonstrators - <https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2022/10/cuba-repression-must-not-be-repeated/>
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- Political and legal landscape: citizen dissatisfaction - <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/why-situation-cuba-deteriorating>
- Political and legal landscape: continued long after - <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/07/11/prison-or-exile/cubas-systematic-repression-july-2021-demonstrators>
- Political and legal landscape: sanctions - <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10045.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: blacklist - <https://www.state.gov/countries-certified-as-not-cooperating-fully-with-u-s-counterterrorism-efforts/>
- Political and legal landscape: designated - <https://www.state.gov/state-sponsors-of-terrorism/>
- Political and legal landscape: imposed - <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10045.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: relaxed - <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10045.pdf>

- Political and legal landscape: new US policy - <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10045.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: first deportation flight - <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-deportation-flights-cuba-restarting/>
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WWL 2024: Church information / Cuba

Christian origins

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

After gaining independence from Spain in 1898, Cuba's dependency on the USA [facilitated](#) the establishment of many Protestant churches and movements including Methodists, Adventists, Presbyterians, Quakers, Baptists and Lutherans. Spiritism was also introduced at that time (*Source: Catholic Church and State in Cuba: Past and present relationships, April/August 2012*).

Church spectrum today

| Cuba: Church networks | Christians | % |
|--|------------------|--------------|
| Orthodox | 47,900 | 0.7 |
| Catholic | 6,146,000 | 88.2 |
| Protestant | 320,000 | 4.6 |
| Independent | 422,000 | 6.1 |
| Unaffiliated | 30,000 | 0.4 |
| Doubly-affiliated Christians | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 6,965,900 | 100.0 |
| <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i> | | |
| Evangelical movement | 194,000 | 2.8 |
| Renewalist movement | 984,000 | 14.1 |

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

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

The largest denomination in Cuba is by far the Roman Catholic Church. According to WCD 2023 estimates, 88.7% of Cuban Christians are Catholics, representing an increase of 0.4% compared to the previous year. However, other Christian denominations continue to have a visible presence and acceptance among the population, especially those linked with the Pentecostal movement.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Incidents of persecution against Christians occur throughout the country. Particular hotspots are the capital, La Havana, and provinces in the eastern part of the island.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not isolated from interaction with other Christians in Cuba and so are not treated as a separate category in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: Examples are the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran and Methodist churches. These churches are monitored and face state action if material or preaching opposing Communist ideology is discovered and when they support demonstrators, especially youth. They may also be criticized by leaders of politicized churches, ideological pressure groups and harassed by regime sympathizers. Some churches belonging to this category are not officially recognized by the State and are not affiliated with the Council of Churches of Cuba - CCC, which is part of the regime's structure.. In such cases, they may suffer the same consequences as unregistered, non-traditional church groups.

Converts: This category includes converts from the Santeria cult or the Communist Party. Converts are often rejected by government officials and subjected to reprisals when they belong to a church considered a regime opponent or when the church's leaders are regarded as counter-revolutionaries. Thus, through intimidation and hostility, attempts are made to discourage conversion. Preventing the growth of the Church in this way is a means of preventing the number of potential regime opponents increasing.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category is made up mainly of Pentecostal and Evangelical groups and also includes Baptist churches. As well as facing the same challenges as Historical Christian communities, when they are considered enemies of the government or counter-revolutionaries, it is almost impossible (in practice) for these church groups to obtain registration and have the same civil rights as churches with state recognition. Due to this impediment, these congregations and their leaders face higher levels of repression and harassment, since they are forced to act outside the law. Most of the time they gather in house-churches in members' homes and have to live with the fear of being prosecuted by the regime or Communist Party militants. As a consequence, when government agents raid house-churches, they are also endangering family homes.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Santeria - <https://www.learnreligions.com/about-santeria-traditions-2562543>
- Christian origins: facilitated - <http://revistas.usal.es/index.php/1130-2887/article/viewFile/9941/10309>

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Cuba

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

| Cuba: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2024 | 73 | 22 |
| WWL 2023 | 70 | 27 |
| WWL 2022 | 66 | 37 |
| WWL 2021 | 62 | 51 |
| WWL 2020 | 52 | 61 |

Cuba rose 3 points overall due to increases in both pressure and violence. There were slight/very slight rises in all Spheres of life, and violence rose from 7.0 points in WWL 2023 to 8.7 points due to increases in the number of reports concerning attacks on church buildings and Christian homes and businesses (among other categories). Government action against dissident voices has continued to rise, becoming particularly evident where church leaders and Christian activists have highlighted government human rights abuses, provided support to protestors, or expressed criticism of the new Family Code. They have soon become targeted for various forms of hostility, including arbitrary arrest.

Persecution engines

| Cuba: Persecution engines | Abbreviation | Level of influence |
|---|--------------|--------------------|
| Islamic oppression | IO | Not at all |
| Religious nationalism | RN | Not at all |
| Ethno-religious hostility | ERH | Not at all |
| Clan oppression | CO | Not at all |
| Christian denominational protectionism | CDP | Very weak |
| Communist and post-Communist oppression | CPCO | Strong |
| Secular intolerance | SI | Medium |
| Dictatorial paranoia | DPA | Strong |
| Organized corruption and crime | OCC | Weak |

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Communist and post-Communist oppression (Strong) - blended with Secular intolerance (Medium)

After the Cuban revolution (1953-1958), the country was structured as a Communist state. Even though there have been adjustments to the original Communist postulates, the country is still ruled according to that political and economic model and the new Constitution has strengthened the Communist Party of Cuba which is referred to as the leading force for both society and state. This means it is a constitutional requirement - also for religious bodies - to submit to Communist party ideology. The legal framework has been adapted so that religious communities are now subject to the government's Office of Religious Affairs, which is linked to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba.

Apart from the virtual idolization of Fidel Castro and the Communist Party, religion does not play a central role in society. The activities of churches considered regime-friendly are accepted, insofar as they do not interfere with the interests of the regime with respect to citizen control. However, neither official registration nor CCC membership prevents regime reprisals taking place where churches do not adhere to the core values of the ruling Communist Party. Churches that are denied registration (mostly Protestant/Evangelical) are frequent victims of abuses by the government and are particularly harshly treated if they try to publicize the violations made against them. Parents who wish to avoid regime indoctrination at school and raise their children according to their Christian faith are regarded by the authorities as enemies of the revolution.

Communist and post-Communist oppression is also blended with *Secular intolerance*: Through public policies and legislative proposals (such as the Family Code – see above: *Religious landscape*), the ruling Communist Party has shown support for demands promoted by pressure groups that counter traditional Christian values. It has also increased levels of repression against any Christian community opposing the new legal regulations which promote intolerance of the Church's teaching on the biblical model of family. These regulations can justify the [criminalization](#) of Christian parents if they do not conform to the ideological postulates promoted by the government (Evangelical Focus, 3 May 2022).

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

This Persecution engine is also blended with *Communist and post-Communist oppression*.

Given that the Communist Party is the only constitutionally recognized political party, anyone questioning the authority of its leaders - whether for reasons of faith or otherwise - is labeled an enemy of the regime. The new Constitution keeps politics in line with the Cuban revolution and safeguards the need to maintain a system of total monitoring. Such totalitarian control has resulted in years of excessive restrictions and infringement of citizens' rights. Corruption and impunity have been used as ways to maintain Communist party power.

Due to the restrictions on the religious freedom of Christians and church activities, Christians have at times been forced to act against their beliefs not only to avoid being targeted by the regime but also simply to gain access to basic services. In this respect, the COVID-19 crisis and the wave of protests in 2021 and 2022 (especially those in July 2021) all served as a convenient opportunity for the regime to increase the levels of repression against any Christians not willing

to align with the interests of the government.

The government controls the state apparatus at all levels and there is no independent authority to ensure respect for the rule of law or to guarantee the human rights of citizens. Unregistered churches and their leaders are particularly vulnerable, since they conduct their church activities illegally, with the constant fear of being discovered and punished with closure, demolition and arrests. Christians from any denomination (including the Catholic Church) have no legitimate space to express themselves freely without fear of reprisals. When they have tried to do so - e.g., by criticizing government actions or by providing support to protestors - they have been the target of arbitrary arrests, abductions and attacks that sometimes continue for over a year.

Drivers of persecution

| Cuba: Drivers of Persecution | IO | RN | ERH | CO | CDP | CPCO | SI | DPA | OCC |
|---|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| | - | - | - | - | VERY WEAK | STRONG | MEDIUM | STRONG | WEAK |
| Government officials | - | - | - | - | Very weak | Strong | Medium | Strong | Weak |
| Ethnic group leaders | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Non-Christian religious leaders | - | - | - | - | - | Very weak | Very weak | Very weak | - |
| Religious leaders of other churches | - | - | - | - | Very weak | Weak | - | Weak | - |
| Violent religious groups | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Ideological pressure groups | - | - | - | - | - | Medium | Medium | Medium | - |
| Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs | - | - | - | - | - | Medium | Weak | Medium | Very weak |
| One's own (extended) family | - | - | - | - | - | Very weak | Very weak | Very weak | - |
| Political parties | - | - | - | - | - | Strong | Medium | Strong | Weak |
| Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Organized crime cartels or networks | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies | - | - | - | - | - | Very weak | Very weak | Very weak | - |

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Communist and post-Communist oppression (blended with Secular intolerance)

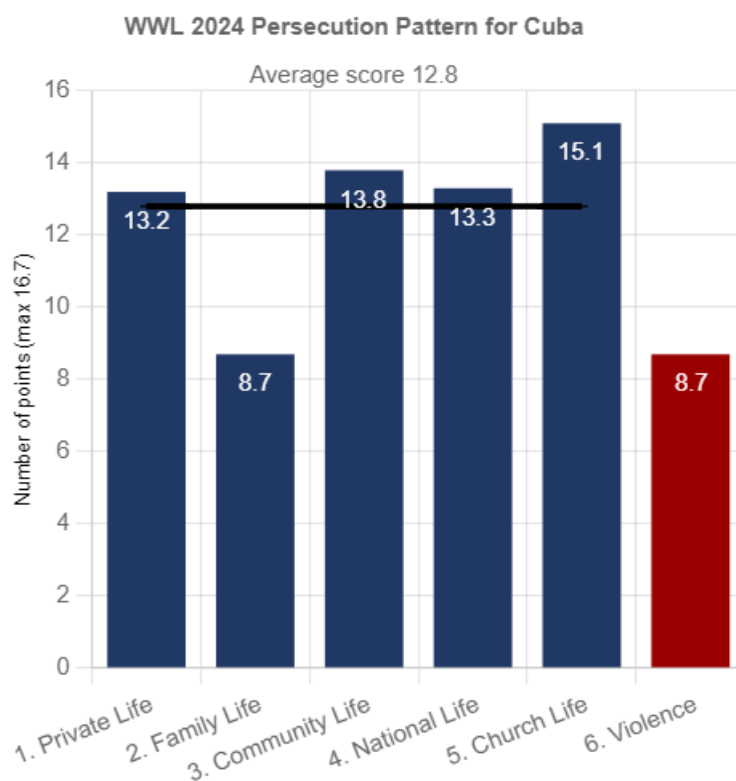
- **Government officials (Strong):** Even though the new Constitution has brought superficial changes to leadership and governmental structure, in practice, government officials at all levels are loyal to the Communist Party as before and all their activities aim to fulfill the regime interests. The authorities encourage the virtual deification of Fidel Castro and openly promote Santeria practices as well as the demands of some ideological pressure groups. Also, the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) and related offices act as a government-controlled group in the way it opposes and represses any Christian individuals and churches that fail to follow the guidelines of the government.
- **Political parties (Strong):** As mentioned above, the country has a single political party, the Communist Party, which aims to uphold Communist values in the country. There is no true democracy and no space for the Church to speak out in public and operate freely. On the contrary, where churches and Christians are discovered acting against Communist values and Party demands, they become a frequent target for oppressive measures.
- **Ideological pressure groups (Medium):** Examples of such groups are: “Union of Young Communists”, “Cuba Central Worker”, “Federation of Cuban Women”, “National Association of Small Farmers”, “José Martí Pioneers Organization”, “Student Federation of Secondary Education”, “University Student Federation”, among others. Members of these groups encourage action to be taken against churches not aligned with regime interests. They defend the regime’s Communist principles and some actively support issues related to sexual education in schools.
- **Citizens (Medium):** They are mainly represented by the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) who are an important arm of the regime, since they act as “agents” to monitor and control Christian (and social) activities throughout the island.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia (blended with Communist and post-Communist oppression)

- **Government officials (Strong):** All members of the state apparatus seek to keep the Communist Party in power and impose policies, laws and measures necessary for the regime to exert totalitarian control over everyone living on the island. Hence, officials censor Christian leaders and groups that can influence society and destabilize the regime. All social activity is interpreted from a political perspective: The Office of Religious Affairs (ORA), an organ of the Cuban Communist Party, exists purely to monitor and restrict the activities of religious groups. The authorities allow citizens to express their religious faith as long as this does not contradict or criticize government positions and policies, which in practice are the same as those of the Communist Party.
- **Political parties (Strong):** The Cuban Communist Party as part of the government, has enough power to permanently censor Christians, especially when they are critical of the government or when they speak out to denounce corruption and violations of human rights. Members of the Communist Party treat Christians as “traitors” or “counter-revolutionaries” as a way of preventing their influence from spreading and decreasing their influence as social actors. The Party acts against Christians to remove voices of dissent.

- **Ideological pressure groups (Medium):** The pressure groups listed above for the *Communist and post-Communist oppression* collaborate with the attempts to suppress any voice in society that contradicts Communist Party interests, including churches and Christian activists who advocate for those in poverty and call for a return to democracy or who promote Christian values in the public sphere, contradicting government interests.
- **Citizens (Medium):** Motivated by fear or in order to show their loyalty to the Communist Party, many citizens participate in mob activity (such as throwing stones) targeting Christian leaders or their churches when they criticize or openly oppose Communist principles.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Cuba shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Cuba increased from 12.5 points in WWL 2023 to 12.8 points in WWL 2024.
- Pressure was strongest in the *Church sphere* (15.1 points), *Community sphere* (13.8 points) and *National Sphere* (13.3) reflecting the high level of monitoring and oppression exerted by the dictatorial government and its supporters targeting church activities and Christians aiming to suffocate them in their daily lives.
- The score for violence in WWL 2024 was 8.7 points, a rise from 7.0 points in WWL 2023. There were a greater number of reports of attacks on Christian buildings and Christian homes and businesses (among other things).

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.75 points)

Expressions of faith in blogs and Facebook posts are possible despite serious restrictions on the Internet service, but social media is closely monitored by the state authorities. Christians can be expected to be treated as 'traitors' if:

- they use digital media to defend their faith;
- make it known that they are members of a church considered illegal or an enemy of the regime;
- criticize any government action;
- denounce corruption and violations of human rights;
- demand greater religious liberty;
- encourage or publicly recognize their participation in anti-government demonstrations;
- defend traditional Christian values regarding family and marriage.

Reprisals against people making such posts (and their families) are frequent and Christians are particularly affected. Censure increased after the July 2021 protests, resulting in more restrictions on Internet access. As a result, Christians have sometimes had to remain in their home without contacting anyone and under close police surveillance. In practice, citizens assume that all social media use and phone conversations are being monitored by the authorities under the application of Decree 370 and Decree 35. The main goal of this kind of harassment is to encourage self-censorship among citizens and suppress any opinions distracting from the state narrative.

Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.50 points)

Access to media in general is very limited due to infrastructure deficiencies and due to the economic crisis affecting the country. However, attempts to access Christian material - especially via the Internet - are restricted by the government through its absolute monopoly over the telecommunication media. Downloaded information and Christian access to non-approved contents are monitored and the user is punished if the contents are linked to Christian doctrine that is openly contradictory to the regime or if the websites consulted are financed by foreign Christian entities or NGOs (especially if they are from the USA). During the WWL 2023 and WWL 2024 reporting periods, there were an increased number of reports of Christians experiencing deliberate telephone, cable and Internet downtime as a show of hostility from the regime ([OCDH, June 2023](#)) to keep them isolated and without the possibility of learning/sharing more

about their faith on digital platforms.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.50 points)

Gatherings of people organized by church members are difficult as freedom of assembly is generally restricted, especially with the tightened restrictions in the New Criminal Code. However, there is a particular bias against those considered as “opponents” or “traitors”, as is the case with many Church members. Meeting with other Christians is especially difficult for the members of unregistered churches/house-churches. Whenever they hold a meeting, even if it is not of a religious nature, they run the risk of being accused by neighbors of conspiring against the government, being raided by the Cuban police, summoned, excessively fined, and arbitrarily prosecuted. According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022), meetings between Christians inside prisons have also been restricted.

Especially during the numerous public protests which occurred throughout the most recent WWL reporting periods, the authorities aimed to impede the gathering of citizens by (amongst other measures) preventing many from leaving their homes. Many Christians were also affected by those measures and, additionally, were prevented from attending church services. Church leaders were reportedly blocked from visiting protesters or being in contact with those participating in protests or any event considered counter-revolutionary by the authorities (reported by [CSW, Cuba - Annual Report 2022, 6 February 2023](#)).

Block 1.10: Christians have been isolated from other family members or other like-minded Christians (e.g. house arrest). (3.50 points)

Christian human rights activists, church leaders and those who constantly question and challenge the regime (especially as part of civic protests), face arbitrary arrest and house-arrest, which causes separation from Christian fellowship and families. If it became known to the authorities that specific persons were intending to participate in any protest action or show their support, they were sometimes forced by state officers to remain in their homes without contacting anyone and under close police surveillance. This type of report increased after the 2021 protests and Christians were a frequent victim of this repressive measure.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (4.00 points)

State education is based on Marxist ideals and is mandatory for all Cuban schoolchildren and students. The promoted ideology practically deifies Marx, Lenin, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, worships the Communist revolution and rejects traditional Christian faith in many areas. Such indoctrination is regularly supported by national events where children are obliged to participate, as happened recently with the so-called “Plan Tún-Tún” in which children were taken from schools to encourage neighbors to participate in the elections for representatives of the National Assembly. Pupils of Christian parents who oppose this indoctrination face particular pressure from teachers and their peers ([Constitutional Reform and Religious Freedom in Cuba, USCIRF, 2022](#)). Fearing consequences for themselves and their parents, many children avoid ex-

pressing their religious convictions at school.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.75 points)

The state is considered the main educator of all children in the country and its Revolution ideology influences children from an early age. Communist education is mandatory in schools and parents cannot prevent the indoctrination of their children. Every morning before the start of classes, all pupils must swear with hand raised: "We will be like Che!" or "Pioneers for Communism, forever with Che!" (Che Guevara is a Communist icon). The repressive legal framework, especially with the New Criminal Code and the New Family Code, allows parents who distance their children from the state's Communist values not only to face intense harassment and threats, but even prison sentences and loss of custody of their children. According to some religious leaders, the new legal provisions can be interpreted so arbitrarily that Christian parents are at risk even if the government determined they were teaching their children religious beliefs or values perceived as in opposition to the government. (US State Department, IRFR 2022 Cuba).

State education thus endangers the right of parents to raise their children according to their own convictions and beliefs and they have no legal means to oppose it. Pressure groups have also advocated in favor of prohibiting homeschooling.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.50 points)

Children of Christians known to promote human rights, traditional faith-based views on family and marriage (in the context of the Family Code referendum and approval) or who are considered to be regime opponents, face intimidation and other difficulties by being regarded as children of "enemies of the revolution" or "traitors". Especially children of Christian members of non-registered churches face rejection, bullying and other hostilities at school by both teachers, CCP officials and fellow pupils when defending their Christian beliefs; this sometimes involves violence. They can also become a target for criticism because of their parents' church affiliation or activities.

As reported by [CSW \(Annual Report 2022 Cuba\)](#), during the WWL 2024 reporting period, children of Christians have been victims of interrogation, arrest, increased pressure to participate in events/organizations endorsed by the regime, among other hostile actions because of the faith in which they were raised by their parents and/or in retaliation for their parents' actions perceived as being critical of the government. It is well-known that the government grants subsidies and other benefits (especially regarding university studies) to those who support the regime, and cuts all aid to those opposing the ruling party (including family members and children).

Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (3.50 points)

Christians who are stigmatized as being regime opponents because of their political and/or church affiliation face various forms of intimidation and oppression that also affects their fami-

lies. As a result, some family members relocate to stay with relatives in other parts of the country to avoid state harassment. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, Christians in detention or in prison were arbitrarily separated from their families and their location was not immediately communicated to relatives, which meant they were kept “incomunicado” for a number of weeks. There were also reports of Christians being threatened with loss of custody, being separated from their children and relatives, or being pressured to leave the country if they continued contradicting the regime’s interests through their church ministry. The regime deliberately causes such separation to discourage other members of the family (especially the younger ones) from following the example of relatives considered government enemies.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.75 points)

Militants and sympathizers of the regime (including family members) closely monitor activities of citizens. This can include, for instance, conversations and gatherings, attempts to travel, house-visits, contact with targeted church leaders, and any contact with international media and international human rights organizations. Christians who have expressed faith-based opinions against the regime (including those who participated in protests or supported the protests) are considered dissidents and are targeted for surveillance, as are those known to belong to churches who oppose the ruling party.

The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) are the main government informers; their aim is to eliminate the spread of anti-Communist ideas (as reported by [OCDH, Libertad Religiosa en Cuba, 2023](#)) with the help of other citizens, militants of the Communist Party, government officials and sometimes other family members. Telephone lines, emails, letters, social media and Internet usage are all monitored through electronic platforms and church infiltrators in order to find evidence for use against Christians and church leaders considered regime opponents. Due to the escalation in reprisals following the 2021 mass protests, even Christians who have not necessarily been critical of the government but who have some influence in society have also been monitored, to prevent them from undermining state actions. The frequent surveillance within churches generates a climate of mistrust.

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.50 points)

All students, including Christians, are forced to learn Marxist ideology as part of the compulsory state curriculum. If they try to oppose such forced indoctrination, they are threatened with being banned from continuing their education or are expelled from their school or university. University authorities are known to impede Christian students (especially if they are involved with non-registered churches or targeted church leaders) from continuing their studies to prevent them spreading their 'subversive ideas' to other students. Some professions and university degree courses (mainly the higher ones) are only accessible for members of the Communist Party, which means that Christians may be blocked from taking certain courses, from

participating in research programs and from receiving scholarships. Christian university students faced severe educational restrictions as part of the reprisals for their (or their parents') participation in or support of the wave of marches demonstrating against regime abuses. This hostility aims to discourage youth involvement in civil society activity and - as reported by [CSW](#) on 9 May 2023 - to pressure them into defending Socialism and Marxism-Leninism .

Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (3.50 points)

This commonly affects Christians in non-registered churches where the imposition of fines is a common strategy to harass opposition voices. On many occasions, public officials ask for money ("contributions") from church leaders in order to allow them to perform their church activities/social projects. This request for money is a 'private arrangement' and has no legal backing. On other occasions, Christians are fined for belonging to a non-registered or 'revolutionary' church, for lending their property to house-church communities, for posting an opinion on social media (IRFR 2022 Cuba), or for attempting to gather to pray for political prisoners. The fines and fees imposed are almost always excessive (especially considering that what a Cuban receives as a salary is often less than the minimum necessary to survive on) and depend on the arbitrary decision of the 'authority' on duty at the time. Nonetheless, with the application of the New Penal Code and the creation of the crime of "abuse of religious freedom" the imposition of fines and sanctions is legitimized on those who, in the exercise of religious freedom, contradict the interests of the government. Therefore, Christians are always at risk of being fined and prosecuted under such ambiguous parameters (see more details above in: *Religious landscape*); and if they do not pay those fines, they may find themselves later summoned to the police station or threatened with arrest.

In addition, police use fines to discourage pastors and Christian activists from travelling abroad, thus preventing contact with the global Church and international human rights organizations. Virtually anything can be chosen as grounds for a fine and be confiscated, for instance a book with a suspicious title or a gift. As a consequence of the 2021 protests, the imposition of fines has become a very frequent form of intimidation.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Throughout the country, this has especially affected Christians who i) left the Communist Party or are not willing to participate in political activities of the ruling Party; ii) belong to non-registered churches known for their opposition to the government; iii) have participated in recent protests against the government; iv) are involved with targeted church leaders; v) are active in church pastoral work; vi) advocate for the release and humanitarian treatment of political prisoners, or vii) manifest any kind of opposition to Communism in general as promoted by the government.

Interrogation and summons are commonly used to threaten and intimidate Christians as listed above for being perceived as opponents. When interrogated, Christians are required to provide contact information of those considered regime opponents (including their family members or church leaders) and details about Christian activities and funding from sources abroad. If they

refuse to share such private details, they are threatened as traitors and become victims of government reprisals. Sometimes they are even pressured into acting as informers within their own churches.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (4.00 points)

The government does not guarantee freedom of expression for anyone in the country, especially lately due to the increased surveillance of 'rebels' and the application of the reformed legal framework to “legalize” repressive practices (Decree 370, Decree 35, New Family Code, New Criminal Code, among others). As a result, numerous restrictions apply. Christians, Christian organizations, religious freedom advocates and Christian human rights activists belonging to a variety of church denominations face threats, subpoenas, arrest, arbitrary detentions, fines, criminal prosecution, travel limitations, censorship, harassment and more, when they speak out about the state's violation of human and civil rights, the humanitarian crisis in the country, the importance of the biblical model of marriage and family, or about the scandals surrounding the Castro family, for instance. Many Christians and their families facing such restrictions belong to non-registered churches which are related to the Evangelical Alliance in Cuba (which is openly critical of government injustices) or have contact with international organizations advocating human rights. They are thus more vulnerable to intimidation from the state authorities.

If a Christian voice is gaining influence and contradicts regime interests, it is automatically stopped by the so-called “opinion agents”. Their task is to spread rumors to damage the popularity of the religious leader, as happened when false allegations were publicized about the Church being the instigator of the protests against the regime. By threatening prosecution, the authorities create a culture of self-censorship, giving no space to any dissenting voice. Additionally, Christians expressing faith-based opinions in public on issues relating to life, family and marriage, have faced fierce opposition from pressure groups enjoying state support, particularly in the context of the referendum on the Family Code (see above: *Religious landscape*).

Block 4.15: Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment. (4.00 points)

The regime has total control over the judicial system and any ruling will always be in the state's favor. Thus, neither the right to procedural guarantees for Christians will be properly safeguarded (including the right to due process) nor even the right to be treated with dignity. If Christians are brought to court, it is because they are considered rebels, subversives, counter revolutionaries, traitors or opponents and are not treated with dignity, equality, impartiality or in accordance with human rights recognized by international bodies and signed by the Cuban state. Frequently, government officials re-interpret legislation in order to deliberately formulate charges and accusations against Christians, when their faith-based activity is considered a challenge to the stability of the regime. Additionally, it is common government practice for detainees to be held in prison for many months before a formal accusation and trial is initiated against them.

According to [USCIRF 2022](#): “Cuban authorities charged some of the detained individuals with crimes such as inciting unrest and disobedience and held mass 'trials' that lacked any semblance of due process”. Additionally, there are frequent complaints about political prisoners, including Christians, facing mistreatment and some forms of torture.

Block 4.16: International monitoring has been hindered when Christians had to stand trial. (4.00 points)

Cuba remains one of the few countries in the world where international human rights organizations do not have full facilities to visit or monitor (as reported by [IACHR Press Release, 12 May 2023](#)), despite the continuous calls for a return to respect for democratic rules and the rule of law and the request of the international community for the cessation of religious repression. If, for reasons of political convenience, an exception is made and an international organization is allowed to enter the country, the government will prevent its representatives from meeting the victims of abuses and from learning about the reality of life for the Cuban people. While there have been opportunities for dialogue, any international organization that has any relationship with anything linked to anti-Communism or 'colonialism' is rejected. Any foreign organization trying to advocate in favor of Christians prosecuted on grounds of faith are not welcome and are hindered from making contact with them or their relatives.

In addition, the recommendations made by multilateral organizations on the treatment of human rights activists and of those considered 'opponents' in prison, are constantly ignored by the regime and they are used as a pretext for reinforcing the repression against them (seeing this as necessary to safeguard the nation from foreign interference). Since the mass protests of 2021, many reports of relatives of the imprisoned (or other church leaders) being threatened abound. They have been told that they will face serious reprisals if they continue to share information with foreign organizations about prison conditions, since passing on such information is considered a "subversive activity". Furthermore, the Cuban state has [rejected](#) the country's inclusion in the list of Countries of Particular Concern published by USCIRF (DDC, 4 December 2022).

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.75 points)

There is currently no possibility that the state will recognize the existence of any other political party than the Communist Party. For example, in the last elections to elect representatives to the National Assembly, only the regime's candidates participated. Hence, any Christian political party is legally forbidden. Where civil society faith-based organizations are perceived as promoters of a vision conflicting with Communist ideals or state interests, they can swiftly become targets for censorship, confiscation and arrest, especially if they are related in any way with non-registered churches, churches viewed as being regime opponents or church leaders considered as counter-revolutionaries. In such cases, the authorities hinder the activities of these organizations (as reported by [OCDH, Libertad Religiosa en Cuba, 2023](#)) and react by arresting and prosecuting Christians in charge of these organizations, expropriating their properties, imposing excessive fines, and confiscating donations and materials, among other reprisals. This has been the case for organizations such as “Coexistence Center”, “The Christian

Liberation Movement”, “The Lawton Foundation” and the “Cuban Evangelical Churches Alliance”. In addition, if Christian NGOs initiate activities related to education (especially in aspects of democracy and rule of law) or health, they automatically face more impediments since those areas are considered to be state-responsibility only.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (4.00 points)

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) is in charge of church registration and can give a church the legal status of associations, on a basis similar to how it officially registers civil society organizations. Further, the government and the Communist Party monitor religious groups through the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA) and seek to control most aspects of religious life. Almost all churches with legal recognition were registered before the Communist revolution of 1959. Since then, only in very rare cases has registration been granted under the apparent justification that another local group has identical or similar objectives, or that the applicant’s activities could in any way harm the common good (i.e., conflict with Communist Party ideology). In consequence, several churches are considered illegal because authorities constantly refuse their applications for registration, which is one of the main obstacles to the full exercise of religious liberty. As they cannot get legal status, they cannot hold “official religious services” or have a proper place to worship. Also this situation increases the difficulties in providing any official training of church leaders, and in obtaining permission to carry out activities outside the place of worship, etc. This is also why the authorities make the registration process almost impossible.

Most of the non-registered churches are considered 'rebels' operating outside the law, they face penalties ranging from fines and confiscation of property to permanent closure. However, in a repressive context like the one lived in Cuba, registered churches also face difficulties when their activities are not deemed to be in line with regime interests. Thus, [USCIRF 2022](#) reported:

- “Despite existing criteria, registration decisions are often arbitrary and discriminatory. Unregistered religious groups are particularly vulnerable, as membership or association with an unregistered religious group is a crime. ... Independent Protestant and Evangelical Protestant pastors are persecuted and forced to migrate, and their churches are denied legal personality and registration.”

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (4.00 points)

Christians belonging to non-registered churches do not have any chance of obtaining permission for building or repairing churches. For registered churches, there are very exceptional cases where church buildings have been allowed to be renovated and even constructed, mainly by foreign work-teams who secretly purchase the materials themselves and carry out work on a voluntary basis. In general, licenses and building permits are very difficult to obtain. However, even when permission is granted, it can be later arbitrarily canceled without proper justification.

If members of the church in question are known to be anti-Communists, permits are often denied for the most absurd reasons.

Over the years, the “Assemblies of God” denomination has seen many of its churches shut down and demolished. Some Catholic buildings that were confiscated at the time of the Revolution have been returned but many have remained in the hands of the state. Expropriation or church demolition is a frequent method of punishment for churches and their leaders considered to be disobedient to the state. Since the mass protests of 2021, the slim chances of obtaining church construction or renovation permits have been even further diminished, due to the government's continued false narrative, that it was church leaders who motivated the population to speak out against the government.

As stated in the US State Department's IRFR 2022 Cuba report:

- “According to OAA, the ORA applied rules in an arbitrary manner, showing favoritism to religious groups seen as cooperative or supportive of the government, while harassing those that were critical and insisted on maintaining organizational independence. The groups were subject to routine harassment and property expropriation, their building or construction permits were denied or delayed, and their leaders were barred from leaving the country”.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points)

Christian preaching is closely monitored, especially where church leaders are perceived as “counterrevolutionaries” due to their opposition to the regime or have given any kind of support to anti-government demonstrations. Their teaching is seen as being subversive and 'imperialist' if there is any mention of issues of democracy and human rights. The use of state informers and infiltrators is widespread and causes self-censorship, especially when family members have been recruited as informers.

Similarly, [CSW](#) stated in its Annual Report 2022 Cuba):

- “The government has a long-term policy of recruiting and planting informants in all religious groups. Informants are tasked with monitoring and reporting content of sermons, homilies, and prayers, for example. By their presence, they also act as a way to pressure religious leaders to practice self-censorship. In many cases, the government targets men and women who are already members of a given religious organization and pressures them, often through threats and blackmail, to become an informant.”

During the WWL 2024 reporting period, both registered and unregistered churches not aligned to the regime faced constant surveillance and direct reprisals for criticism aired by church leaders. Government officials or sympathizers of the regime deliberately look for political connotations in the sermons preached, in order to justify intimidation of whole church congregations through the prosecution of church members and leaders. Again, in an attempt to intimidate them further, some church leaders received official visits from members of the Cuban Council of Churches and the Cuban Communist Party.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points)

The main instigator of persecution is the government, and dissidents are routinely punished by arrest, prosecution, and other kinds of suppression. Christians who report such matters suffer many forms of retaliation without being able to defend themselves. Christians who make known the human rights situation inside Cuba, either nationally or internationally, automatically become targets for persecution. Common practices used against them are:

- prevention from traveling abroad;
- smear campaigns;
- denial of basic services;
- cutting communication lines;
- prevention from meeting with foreigners;
- document retention;
- frequent police summons (including children);
- constant surveillance, even outside their homes;
- threats to take custody of their children;
- denial of permits or licenses;
- excessive fines;
- death threats (also against family members);
- confiscation of property;
- arbitrary arrests;
- irregular trials;
- closure of churches and private businesses;
- general discrimination;
- impediments to leaving their own homes;
- forced exile.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

| Cuba: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire | WWL 2024 | WWL 2023 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| 6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons? | 12 | 7 |
| 6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons? | 45 | 80 |
| 6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons? | 30 | 12 |
| 6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)? | 0 | 10 |
| 6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)? | 24 | 18 |
| 6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons? | 7 | 3 |
| 6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons? | 5 | 0 |

| Cuba: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire | WWL 2024 | WWL 2023 |
|--|----------|----------|
| 6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons? | 2 | 0 |
| 6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons? | 6 | 55 |

In the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- **Christians buildings attacked or closed (12):** Two churches were confiscated and another 10 were vandalized by government officers and Communist sympathizers.
- **Christians detained (45):** Most arrests involved Christians from various denominations being arbitrarily detained as a (seemingly never ending) reprisal for their participation in or support for the mass demonstrations in 2021 (or other protests organized to highlight the abuses of regime), or for requesting the release of Christian political prisoners. Also, there were cases when Christians were detained to prevent their attendance at church services.
- **Christians imprisoned or punished by the government (30):** As a result of the manipulation of the legal framework, Christians were criminally prosecuted where they refused to follow Communist postulates and/or were involved in movements highlighting human rights abuses and demanding more freedom .Many Christian prisoners remain incarcerated without being officially sentenced.
- **Christians attacked (24):** The attacks include incidents in which Christians were physically abused in jails, as well as incidents related to death-threats for expressing their opposition to the regime.

5 Year trends

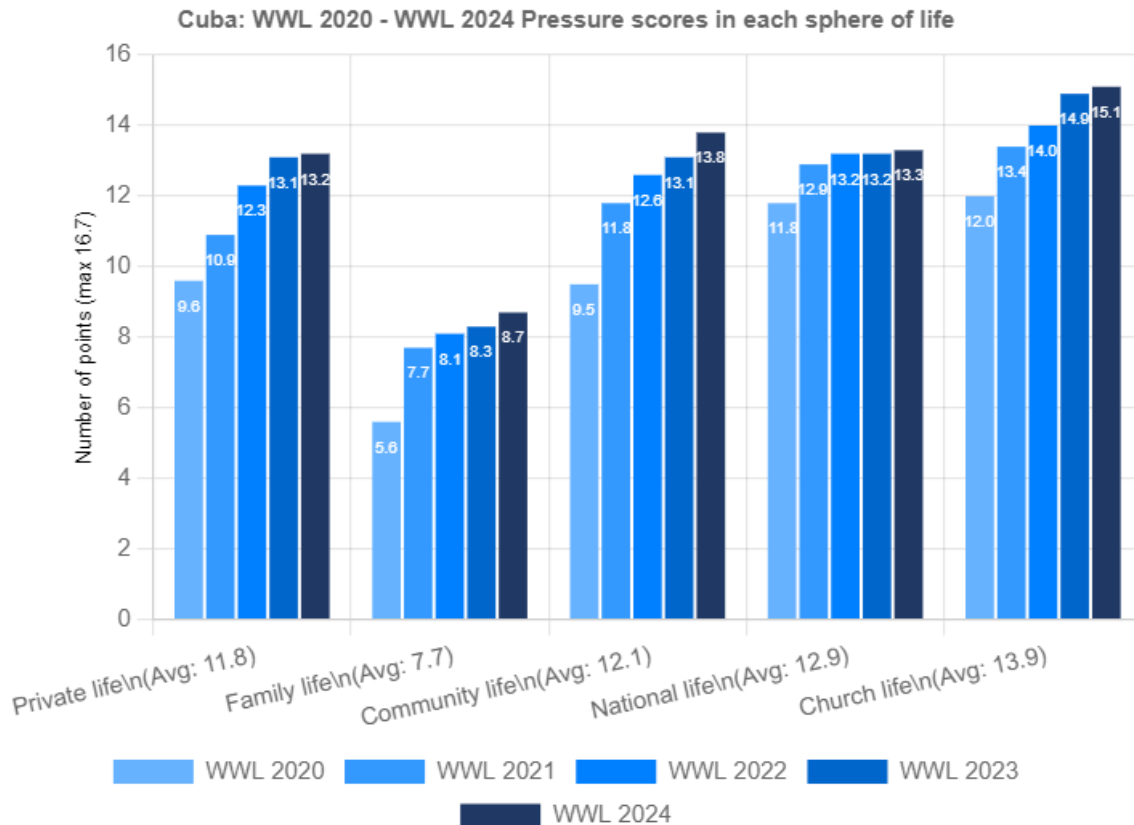
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

| Cuba: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024 | Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life |
|---------------------------|---|
| 2024 | 12.8 |
| 2023 | 12.5 |
| 2022 | 12.0 |
| 2021 | 11.3 |
| 2020 | 9.7 |

The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians has consistently been above 9.7 points and has steadily risen over the last five reporting periods, reaching its highest level in WWL 2024.

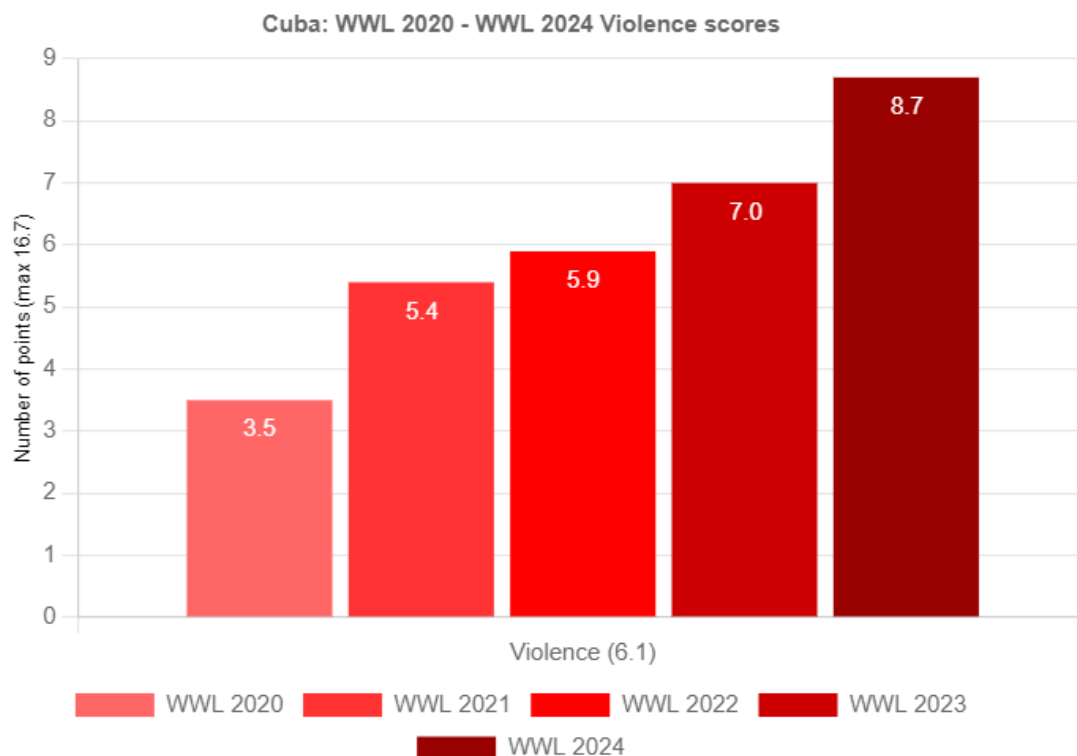
5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The last five reporting periods show a general trend of increasing pressure in all Spheres of life. Looking at the average score per sphere of life, it can be seen that the most significant levels of pressure are found in the *Church, National, Community and Private* spheres of life. This reflects the way the government is trying to systematically oppress and silence those within the churches who oppose Communist values and the dictatorial measures of the regime.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

The chart below shows that the score for violence has been increasing since WWL 2020. The use of violence by the government has increased in an attempt to intimidate and silence Christians and other groups considered to be opponents and traitors. For WWL 2024 the level of violence has reached the highest level of all 5 reporting periods due to government action against churches, church leaders and Christian activists not aligned with government interests.



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

| Group | Female Pressure Points |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Economic | - |
| Political and Legal | Imprisonment by government |
| Security | - |
| Social and Cultural | Violence – psychological |
| Technological | - |

Pressure on Christian women and girls in Cuba is, in part, facilitated by legislative gaps concerning domestic and intrafamily violence, although the recently ratified controversial family code does include additional protection for women and girls ([The Guardian, 26 September 2022](#)). Data gaps restrict comprehensive analysis, but reports indicate that domestic violence worsened in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ([OHCHR, 31 January 2022](#)). Similarly, the increasing rate of femicide in Cuba poses a viable threat to Christian women and girls ([Havana Live, 2023](#)).

Women involved in activism are typically fired from their job, threatened and monitored. For example, police [continued to harass](#) the well-known “Ladies in White” – a group of women founded by the relatives of political prisoners – on their way to and from Sunday church services; primarily to quell their frequent marches (France24, 24 January 2022). 2 women have received sentences of six to eight years for participating in the 11J demonstrations, and are now suffering

under deplorable conditions in prison. An expert confirmed that “Christian women are among those who lose their jobs, receive threats, are monitored and mistreated by the Police due to their activism, such as the case of the Ladies in White.” In addition to beatings, members have also been arrested and detained for short periods of time during 2023. Due to the historical repression of religion in Cuba, especially Christianity, it is challenging for women to form stable families. The Cuban media have recorded evictions carried out against women who are the heads of households and even against pregnant women. Christian women and girls are additionally often insulted because of their more conservative sexual values. In Cuba, abortion has been legal and free for a long time and is presented as being a normal contraceptive method. Abortions are obligatory in the case of genetic malformation, in line with the Cuban government's ideal of maintaining a 0% rate of births with deformities. This is a major challenge for Christian women wishing to remain loyal to their Christian beliefs. Refusal may be regarded as an act of opposition towards the government.

While a greater issue for men, women were also affected by the mass detentions following the [2021 Cuban protests](#) (HRW, 11 July 2022). Reports suggest female political prisoners, like their male counterparts, encounter restricted access to medicines and Christian material.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

| Group | Male Pressure Points |
|---------------------|--|
| Economic | - |
| Political and Legal | Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement |
| Security | Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical |
| Social and Cultural | Denied food or water; Violence – psychological |
| Technological | - |

Christian men are generally more susceptible to arrests and harassment since they are more likely to hold leadership positions from which they criticize government actions based on their Christian beliefs. They additionally face fines, confiscation of Christian literature, destruction of property, and death threats. A country expert commented: “Many house church leaders continued to report frequent visits from state security agents or CCP officials. Some reported warnings from the agents and officials that the education of their children, or their own employment, could be threatened if the house church leaders continued their activities.” Members of the [Christian Liberation Movement](#) are also continuously besieged, threatened, and incarcerated in [inhumane prison conditions](#), evidenced by the treatment of Yandier García Labrada (CubaNet, 28 July 2021; CubaNet, 13 December 2021).

Following the rise in detentions from the 11th July protests in 2022 ([The Guardian, 15 February 2022](#)), several demonstrators remained missing months later and hundreds more await their verdicts ([Aleteia, 21 September 2021](#)). A pastor and human rights defender has been sentenced to 7 years in prison following the 11J protests. He is subject to mistreatment and isolation, lacking food, sun and information and facing constant psychological abuse.

National service is compulsory for men. If it is discovered that they are active Christians or have Christian parents, the level of discrimination and persecution depends on the attitude of the commanding officer. There have also been reports that Christian conscripts have been forced to engage in military operations that contravene their beliefs. Although alternative forms of social service are theoretically possible, the right to conscientious objection is very rarely upheld.

Given the economic difficulties resulting from state policies and US sanctions, many men must work abroad in order to meet family needs. The Cuban government, however, has made it increasingly difficult for regulated persons – active critics of the government – to travel, including church leaders. A country expert adds: “One of the most common measures of the regime to repress opposition voices is to prohibit or prevent them from leaving ... especially if the trip takes place in the context of a summit, forum, congress or event in which it is discussed the violation of human rights on the island.”

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Cuba):

- “In October, the government denied Imam Abu Duyanah permission to travel outside the country, for reasons of 'public interest', preventing him from making a planned pilgrimage to Mecca. According to CSW, in March, Credit and Commerce Bank employees in Holguin prevented a woman from entering the bank's building because she was wearing a hijab.”

According to USCIRF 2023 Cuba:

- "President of the unregistered Free Yoruba Association of Cuba (Asociación de Yorubas Libres de Cuba, or 'Free Yorubas') Donaida Pérez Paseiro and her husband, the community's vice president Loreto Hernández García, were charged [in 2021] with 'public disorder', 'disobedience', 'spreading the epidemic' and 'incitement' and eventually sentenced to eight years in prison. [During 2022] Pérez Paseiro experienced multiple medical emergencies while in prison and authorities reportedly tried to force her to renounce her faith. Hernández García reportedly suffers from several health conditions, including asthma, hypertension, diabetes, and other cardiac issues. Prison authorities also reportedly tried to force him to renounce his faith. In May [2022], Radio Televisión Martí reported that Hernández García's health has severely deteriorated in prison, as authorities fail to provide him food that takes into consideration his diabetes. He received medical treatment in a hospital, but state security forced him back into prison in June.”

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Communist and post-Communist oppression, blended with Secular intolerance and Dictatorial paranoia

After almost 65 years of Communist government, the quality of life in Cuba is deteriorating fast. The evident failures of the political system and the discontent shown by the Cuban population have led to an increase in government hostility towards any form of criticism. Any critical voice is immediately interpreted as a sign of political opposition and regarded as a crime against the state. Hence, the persecution of Christians can only worsen as they continue to try to find ways to live out their faith and to assist the most vulnerable in society. The crisis on the island is multi-dimensional, and the international community - besides continuing to denounce the continual violations of human rights (of which the Church is also a victim) - should at the same time offer the Cuban government help in alleviating the conditions of injustice that exist in the country.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: criminalization - <https://evangelicalfocus.com/world/16636/the-new-cuban-legislation-on-the-family-is-harmful-for-families-and-the-nation>
- Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.50 points): (OCDH, June 2023) - https://derechossocialescuba.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/LRCuba2_compressed.pdf
- Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.50 points): CSW, Cuba - Annual Report 2022, 6 February 2023 - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2023/02/06/report/5929/article.htm>
- Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (4.00 points): (Constitutional Reform and Religious Freedom in Cuba, USCIRF, 2022) - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/2022%20Constitutional%20Reform%20and%20Religious%20Freedom%20in%20Cuba.pdf>
- Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.50 points): CSW (Annual Report 2022 Cuba) - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2023/02/06/report/5929/article.htm>
- Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.75 points): OCDH, Libertad Religiosa en Cuba, 2023 - https://derechossocialescuba.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/LRCuba2_compressed.pdf
- Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.50 points): CSW - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2023/05/09/press/5995/article.htm>
- Block 4.15: Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment. (4.00 points): USCIRF 2022 - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/2022%20Constitutional%20Reform%20and%20Religious%20Freedom%20in%20Cuba.pdf>
- Block 4.16: International monitoring has been hindered when Christians had to stand trial. (4.00 points): IACHR Press Release, 12 May 2023 - <https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2023/086.asp>
- Block 4.16: International monitoring has been hindered when Christians had to stand trial. (4.00 points): rejected - https://diariodecuba.com/derechos-humanos/1670178847_43847.html
- Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.75 points): OCDH, Libertad Religiosa en Cuba, 2023 - https://derechossocialescuba.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/LRCuba2_compressed.pdf

- Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (4.00 points): USCIRF 2022 - <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/2022%20Constitutional%20Reform%20and%20Religious%20Freedom%20in%20Cuba.pdf>
- Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points): CSW - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2023/02/06/report/5929/article.htm>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: The Guardian, 26 September 2022 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/26/cubans-vote-in-favour-of-family-law-reform-that-will-allow-same-sex-marriage>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: OHCHR, 31 January 2022 - <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/chile-derechos-digitales.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Havana Live, 2023 - <https://havana-live.com/cuban-government-admits-increase-in-femicides-in-2023/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: continued to harass - <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220124-ladies-in-white-opposition-leader-arrested-in-cuba>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 2021 Cuban protests - <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/07/11/prison-or-exile/cubas-systematic-repression-july-2021-demonstrators>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Christian Liberation Movement - <https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/qurium/cubanet.org/noticias-condenan-a-cinco-anos-de-prision-a-un-miembro-del-movimiento-cristiano-que-protesto-en-una-cola.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: inhumane prison conditions - <https://www.cubanet.org/noticias/yandier-garcia-labrada-cumple-14-meses-en-prision-incomunicado/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: The Guardian, 15 February 2022 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/15/cuba-protesters-sentenced-20-years-anti-government-july>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Aleteia, 21 September 2021 - <https://aleteia.org/2021/09/21/religious-freedom-commission-issues-detailed-report-on-cuban-protests/>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

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