

World  
Watch  
Research

## Cuba: Full Country Dossier

January 2023



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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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 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

# WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Cuba

## Brief country details

Cuba: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
11,306,000	6,936,000	61.3

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

## Map of country



Cuba: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	70	27
WWL 2022	66	37
WWL 2021	62	51
WWL 2020	52	61
WWL 2019	49	59

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Cuba:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Political parties, Government officials, 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 arrest, smear campaigns, mobility restrictions, prison sentences and/or harassment by the government and its sympathizers (usually called "repudiation acts" and might include physical violence). Also, with the aim of controlling and reducing the Church's influence, it is usual that the registration of new churches is denied, thus forcing many churches to operate illegally. The authorities will then impose penalties such as the complete refusal to issue licenses, the imposition of fines, confiscation of property, 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

- **May 2022, Palma Soriano:** Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo, pastor of Monte de Sion Independent Church was arrested in August 2021 for his participation in the peaceful protests of July 2021, along with other members of his church. In December 2021 he was sentenced to 8 years in prison charged with disrespect, public disorder, incitement and assault. In May 2022, his [sentence](#) was reduced to seven years in prison and his appeal was rejected (USCIRF, accessed 11 January 2023). His wife has been threatened with imprisonment if she continues to speak out publicly about her husband's case.

- **July 2022, Havana:** Raul Capote, a youth leader of Calvario Baptist Church, was [beaten](#) in front of his wife and children by a police agent and arrested after posting a poem on Facebook which criticized government repression and asked for God's intervention (DDC, 12 July 2022).
- **September 2022, Havana:** David Pantaleón, a Roman Catholic priest leading the Jesuit order in Cuba, [was forced to leave the country](#) after the regime refused to renew his residency permit (DLA, 13 September 2022). He was Director of the Sunday bulletin 'Vida Cristiana', which regularly denounced regime abuses.

## 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: sentence - <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/lorenzo-rosales-fajardo>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: beaten - [https://diariodecuba.com/derechos-humanos/1657578337\\_40844.html](https://diariodecuba.com/derechos-humanos/1657578337_40844.html)
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: was forced to leave the country - <https://www.diariolasamericas.com/america-latina/regimen-cuba-expulsa-sacerdote-david-pantaleon-n4256662>
- 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-respetad-libertad-religiosa/>

# WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Cuba

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp.140-142)	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf">https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf</a>	17 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19583447">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19583447</a>	17 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/CUB">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/CUB</a>	17 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cuba/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cuba/</a>	17 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/cuba">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/cuba</a>	17 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.49)	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf</a>	17 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	28 July 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Cuba not included	Democracy Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom Index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/cuba/freedom-world/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/cuba/freedom-world/2022</a>	17 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/cuba/freedom-net/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/cuba/freedom-net/2022</a>	11 January 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/cuba">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/cuba</a>	17 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/carib.htm#cu">https://www.internetworldstats.com/carib.htm#cu</a>	17 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/cuba">https://rsf.org/en/cuba</a>	17 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/cub">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/cub</a>	17 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/CUB">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/CUB</a>	17 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cuba/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cuba/</a>	17 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL	USCIRF 2022	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/2022%20Cuba.pdf">https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/2022%20Cuba.pdf</a>	17 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=CUB">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=CUB</a>	17 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries, Cuba not included	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/e408a7e21ba62d843bdd90dc37e61b57-0500032021/related/mpo-lac.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/e408a7e21ba62d843bdd90dc37e61b57-0500032021/related/mpo-lac.pdf</a>	17 June 2022

## 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).

Regarding COVID-19, the government of Cuba did not react immediately as the virus spread. Eventually, due to the increase in infections, the government ordered the [gradual introduction](#) of numerous strict measures (Real Instituto del Cano, 10 June 2020). Such measures proved 'useful' in [intensifying](#) restrictions on citizens' fundamental rights, especially those of regime critics (Human Rights Watch, 7 December 2020).

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 severe commodity shortages 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 the [month of September 2022](#), at the end of the WWL 2023 reporting period, 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). The total collapse of the National Energy System that left the entire country without electricity for more than one day, was only the 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 previously in July and November 2021 (Observatorio Cubano de Derechos Humanos, 30 September 2022). According to [Amnesty International](#), 26 arrests were made against demonstrators (AI, 5 October 2022).

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; however, 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. Protesters highlighted the government's responsibility for the shortages of basic goods, restrictions on civil liberties, and the poor handling of the COVID-19

crisis. According to the Cuban Conflict Observatory, in the period October 2021–September 2022, there had been a constant [increase](#) in the total number of protests (including minor ones) being staged in the country, reaching a total of 3,382 incidents (Observatorio Cubano, September 2022).

According to the organization Justicia 11J: In response to the July 2021 protests, the state authorities [arbitrarily detained](#) 1,397 protestors (including 15 minors), of whom 631 had been released by February 2022 (Radio Television Martí, 9 February 2022). Some leading protesters were charged in [quick trials](#) without the presence of a defense lawyer (against all rules of due process) (The New York Time, 28 July 2021). Relatives of protesters and political detainees were [harassed](#) due to their publicizing the human rights violations being perpetrated by the authorities (ICHR, 16 February 2022). In the WWL 2023 reporting period, one of the [most prominent](#) fast-track court-cases involved the church leader, Pastor Lorenzo Rosales (Evangelical Focus, 6 May 2022) - see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights*.

A large-scale [March for Change](#) was initially planned to take place on 20 November 2021, but due to repressive state tactics against the coordinators and against the signatories of letters sent to the government offices requesting authorization for the march, the protest organizers moved the march to an earlier date, to 15 November (Cuba center, 14 October 2021). The Cuban government [alleged](#) that the planned demonstration was unconstitutional because it promoted regime change on the island and was being financed by the US government and its “subversive organizations and agencies”, hence, the authorities mobilized all the resources at its disposal to quell the demonstration in advance (GJIA, 2 February 2022). The tactics [included](#) the blocking of Internet services, arbitrary arrests and impediments to leaving home (BBC News, 15 November 2021). The repressive measures were not only evident on the day of the march, but also months in advance, during which time the authorities intimidated the promoters of the march through defamation campaigns, police investigation, detention and summary trials of the people who participated in the July 2021 protests, dismissals, threats of being charged with various crimes, including civil disobedience, illegal demonstrations and incitement to commit a crime, etc. Groups sympathetic to the government attacked the houses of those known or perceived as dissidents and carried out surveillance. As a result, it was reported that most Cuban dissidents [stayed at home](#) due to the severe government pressure (Reuters, 16 November 2021).

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 in July 2021 (HRW, 11 July 2022).

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has drawn [attention](#) to the continuing repression and intimidation being carried out by the Cuban authorities, pointing out that this has led to a climate of fear and self-censorship, and has successfully discouraged citizens from exercising their right to protest (OAS Press Release, 29 November 2021). With Resolution 2021/2872 (RSP), the [European Parliament](#) also condemned the extreme violence used against protesters, human rights defenders, independent journalists, artists, dissidents and opposition political leaders by the Cuban government (European Parliament, 16 September 2021). It also

[demanded](#) the "immediate and unconditional" release of all prisoners of conscience (Parlamento Europeo, 16 December 2021).

[Human Rights Watch](#) reported that the Cuban government continued to repress and punish virtually all forms of dissent and public criticism in 2021 (HRW 2022 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.

The government has refused to recognize human rights monitoring as a legitimate activity and denies legal status to local rights groups. Additionally, in an attempt to give a certain appearance of legitimacy to its actions, in May 2022 a New Penal Code was approved by the government and entered into force on 1 December 2022. This replaces the penal code enacted in 1987 and is much more restrictive. According to Amnesty International (AI, 2 December 2022) [five "alarming aspects"](#) of this new legislation are:

1. Many provisions of the criminal code that have been used to silence and imprison activists for decades remain.
2. The New Penal Code penalizes anyone who "endangers the constitutional order and the normal functioning" of the government.
3. It criminalizes receipt of funding, further stifling independent journalists and activists.
4. It severely limits freedom of expression online.
5. The new penal code retains the death penalty for 23 different crimes.

Another significant legal reform was made to the Family Code. The [text](#) was submitted to 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](#) in favor of supporting the changes while at the same time [criticizing](#) those who tried to launch a campaign against the approval of the reform (Swissinfo, 20 September 2022).

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](#) (Wola, 16 December 2022):

- i) Authorized 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) Removed 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) Resumed the “Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program (CFRP)” to allow eligible U.S. citizens to apply for their Cuban relatives to travel to the USA without waiting for their migrant visas to become available.
- iv) Facilitated 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.

### **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) ([OECD, 2019](#)). According to [Girls Not Brides](#), 26% 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 CIA Factbook, 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 2021).

## Religious landscape

Cuba: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	6,936,000	61.3
Muslim	9,500	0.1
Hindu	24,100	0.2
Buddhist	6,300	0.1
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	810	0.0
Bahai	1,300	0.0
Atheist	476,000	4.2
Agnostic	1,898,000	16.8
Other	1,954,650	17.3
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

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 force 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 (CCI, 2022 ).

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

Government attitudes towards churches depend upon whether they submit to government orders and ideology and vary according to the status of the church. The 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, 2022).

In the WWL 2023 reporting period, the Cuban parliament approved the reform of the criminal code, including new crimes that put at risk 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](#): "Who, 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 highlight 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 (among 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 (Aciprensa, 21 October 2021), 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 hostilities. According to the USCIRF [report](#) "Constitutional reform and religious freedom in Cuba", 93% 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, 2022). Other forms of persecution targeting religious leaders and their communities are as follows:

- Threats of dismissal, slander, defamation, travel restrictions, death threats, home-raids, '[acts of repudiation](#)' (ADN Cuba, 15 November 2021)
- [Arbitrary arrests](#) (Radio Televisión Martí, 15 November 2021)
- [Expulsions](#) from the country (The Washington Times, 03 August 2022)
- Unjustified police [citations](#) (Cibercuba, 23 October 2021)
- [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).
- 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).
- 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).
- Some prayer events have had to be [cancelled](#) after severe threats were issued by the Cuban government (CSW, 27 April 2022).

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). 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 June 2021, the Ministry of Education [approved](#) a comprehensive sexual education program for schools with a focus on gender and sexual and reproductive rights (Centro UC, Derecho y Religión, June 2021). Christian communities and churches expressed their [concern](#), among other things, for the way biblical views were being referred to in this program as homophobic and transphobic (ACBOCOO, 22 May 2021). The [Cuban Catholic bishops](#) also pointed out that the program does not take sufficient account of the fundamental rights of parents in the sexual education of their children (Vatican News, 22 June 2021). However, due to the COVID-19 crisis,

in September 2021, the head of the School Health Department of the [Ministry of Education](#) postponed the implementation of the program until further notice (Mined, 14 September 2021).

The new, progressive Family Code opens the doors to same-sex marriage, allows same-sex couples to adopt children and makes it possible for parental rights to be shared by surrogate mothers. However, it 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 have faced [harassment](#) (Radio Television Marti, 11 February 2022). Similarly, LGBT+ activists have on occasions [disrupted](#) church services (Evangelico Digital, 8 June 2022 ) and have used social media to [insult](#) and/or minimize the views of Christians (Cuba trendings, 7 June 2022).

In general, during the WWL 2023 reporting period, the repression of the Cuban Church has visibly increased, especially as a consequence of the Church supporting citizen demands for an end to the Communist dictatorship. The regime has responded both with pressure and violence and has acted with impunity.

### 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. Christian activists, such as the ‘Ladies in White,’ have also come under pressure and reportedly been beaten, arrested and detained ([HRW 2021 country chapter](#)). Christian men are more likely to be arrested since they more often hold leadership positions from which they can speak out against the government.

## Economic landscape

According to UNDP's HDI profile:

- **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

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean reported that in 2020, the Cuban economy showed a decline of 10.9% (while GDP per capita showed an annual decrease of 10.8%). The economic contraction [worsened](#) in the context of COVID-19, the intensification of the economic and commercial blockade, and the worsening of internal imbalances (ECLAC, 2021). According to the [Circle of Latin American Studies](#), the GDP remains positive, but there was a noticeable slowdown in the second quarter of 2022.

The economic crisis has hit all Cubans. The loss of purchasing power is [worse](#) in the case of food due to the year-on-year inflation of 43% for food products (CiberCuba, 28 June 2022). According to the Minister of Economy and Planning, Alejandro Gil Fernández, from October 2021 to October 2022, inflation [increased](#) by almost 40%. Similarly, from January to October 2022, the average price of the basket of goods and services grew by almost 29% (Cubadebate, 12 December 2022). 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 [US sanctions](#) 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 *Political and Legal landscape* above), 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 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 inequalities, 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). The Cuban government then 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, as they will now have to use an alternative currency, which may well be the euro. The adoption of a single currency led to a sharp increase in the prices of many products, but this was not balanced by a simultaneous increase in wages.

In general, Christians have faced the same economic hardships as all other citizens. However, the small amounts of support they receive via foreign donations are constantly monitored and can be a reason for being fined by the authorities. Reports from in-country sources have revealed that non-monetary donations made to churches have 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 allegedly for not being included in the 124 activities legally permitted. In addition, it has been reported that some Protestant

churches in Santiago de Cuba have [not been able to acquire](#) the funds they need for their staff and church activities due to their accounts being frozen by the Central Bank of Cuba (Cuba en Miami, 25 October 2020). In this context, according to in-country sources, Catholic church leaders affirmed that they had to resort to the black market for obtaining supplies for soup kitchens, care centers for the elderly and the aid they give to homeless people on the street. Additionally, a Lutheran church representative told media that the authorities are thus making it very difficult for churches to offer humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable.

### 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. The female labor force participation rate is 40.7%, compared to 66.8% for men, in part due to societal norms which place women in the domestic sphere ([UNDP, 2020, p. 362](#)).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the the CIA Factbook:

- **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:** 99.8% (% ages 15 and older)
- **Population below poverty line:** NA

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **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):** 2.8% (2021)
- **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 UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **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.

At the social level, the [vulnerability](#) of the Cuban population has worsened (El País, 11 July 2022). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were already great difficulties, but the introduction of lockdown measures, the closing of borders and the latest economic reforms has impacted the economy, caused more poverty and created shortages in basic goods, medicines and services. To this must be added the continual [power-cuts](#) (Reuters, 22 June 2022), [food shortages](#) (The Washington Post, 21 May 2022) and poor management of the COVID-19 crisis. Parallel to this, there is an ongoing [housing crisis](#) that has forced several families to share a single house (AP News, 22 June 2021). Many Cubans have no running water available and have to stand in long [queues](#) for water, food and medicines (RPP Noticias, 11 January 2022). The scale of the crisis caused anger to erupt in 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*).

Mass migration has become a [significant problem](#) in the country (El País, 14 September 2022), and in the short term its consequences 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). Thus, only taking into account the data from 2022, the [US government](#) reported that almost 270,000 Cubans had tried to enter its territory (US Customs and Borders Protection, 14 December 2022). That figure [represents](#) more than 2% of the inhabitants of Cuba (El País, 13 November 2022). 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 (Diario de Cuba, 14 May 2022).

The crisis - including that caused by the COVID19 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 [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 too critical even when that criticism is not of a political or ideological nature. Many faith-

based organizations are thus 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). Those not belonging to the Council of Churches of Cuba were often [hindered](#) by the authorities and threatened with arrest for such activities (Periodico Cubano, 19 August 2020). Some Christians were accused of deliberately spreading the COVID-19 virus through this ministry. Due to such intimidation, some churches decided not to be involved in aid distribution. Humanitarian aid [sent](#) to churches from abroad was banned unless channeled through the CCC (Periódico Cubano, 19 August 2020) and could even then be [arbitrarily withheld](#) (PR newswire, 24 August 2020). The hostility of the government in these matters led to the [arrest](#) of a number of church leaders who had been assisting people in poverty (Radio Televisión Martí , 2 February 2022).

### 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 ([OECD, 2019](#)). Domestic violence reportedly soared during the COVID-19 pandemic ([Foreign Policy, 24 July 2022](#)).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **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 the World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile phone (cellular) subscriptions:** 63 per 100 people (2021).

According to Freedom on the Net 2022:

- Cuba is a not free country (Score 20): Internet freedom in Cuba continued to decline during the coverage period (June 2021 – May 2022), as authorities took multiple repressive steps to disrupt protests that occurred throughout 2021. Despite improvements to technical infrastructure, Cuba has one of the lowest connectivity rates in the Western hemisphere, regular Internet access remains extremely expensive, and connections are poor. Authorities both monitor usage and work to direct traffic to the government-controlled intranet. The state engages in content-manipulation efforts and blocks independent news sites. Political

dissent is punishable under a wide range of laws, including Decree Laws 35 and 370, which have been used in recent years to intimidate and silence online journalists. A widespread series of public antigovernment protests held in late 2020 and throughout 2021 were facilitated online, as Cubans circumvented government censorship through grassroots digital innovations. The authorities restricted Internet connectivity, blocked social media and communications platforms, and selectively disrupted dissidents' service in response.

- In July 2021, as Cubans mobilized the largest antigovernment demonstrations in the country since the 1959 revolution, the authorities briefly restricted Internet access and blocked WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal. These steps prevented protesters from effectively using digital tools to coordinate protests, and they separated the movement from independent news outlets and Cubans based abroad, who had rallied support for the demonstrations on international social media platforms.
- Reports indicate that Cuba has begun to use Chinese technology in its ongoing effort to block and filter some online content.

According to Reporters Without Borders (World Press Freedom 2022):

- Cuba remains the worst country for press freedom in Latin America, scoring 27.32 points and located at 173 position. Television, radio, and newspapers are all closely monitored by the government. The Constitution prohibits privately owned press. Independent journalists, for their part, are kept under surveillance by agents who aim to lessen their ability to move about, and subject the reporters to interrogation and delete information in their possession. The government controls Internet access. Although bloggers and citizen-journalists see a space for freedom on the web, they navigate at their own risk, and are frequently imprisoned or forced into exile. Arrests, arbitrary detentions, threats of imprisonment, persecution and harassment, illegal raids of homes, confiscation and destruction of equipment – all this is the daily lot for journalists who do not follow the Castroist party line.

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 since 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](#): “Legal Decree 35 makes it clear that as far as the Cuban Communist Party is concerned, there is no space for any kind of dissent on the island. Cubans will be unable to comment honestly on the reality of their lives without fear of being charged with cyberterrorism; this includes religious associations and leaders who speak out on issues that affect freedom of religion or belief as well as wider issues facing Cuban society” (CSW, 18 August 2021).

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 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 weapons 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 cutoffs](#) 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).

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and its Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression have expressed [concern](#) about how the new telecommunications and cybersecurity regulations in Cuba will impact the exercise of freedom of expression on the Internet and on users' right to privacy (IACHR, September 2021). In their opinion, the new regulations could well be aimed at restricting critical and dissident views (among other forms of discourse of public interest) while allegedly being put in place to protect security, law and order, national defense, and other government interests.

On the island there is a context of repression, police persecution and intolerance of criticism, as well as disrespect for freedom of expression and the press. Especially in the run-up to the protests called for November 2021, various journalists and media outlets were being targeted by the government. Some were put under [surveillance](#) (Cuba Net 15 November 2021) and prevented from leaving their homes, in addition to having their Internet access blocked. 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. During the COVID-19 pandemic most Christian denominations were unable to broadcast their church services online due to connectivity limits. In the case of unregistered Christian churches, this would anyway have been illegal.

## Security situation

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.

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.

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 documented in the first [6 months of 2022](#), 2,977 repressive actions, including harassment of relatives of those participating in demonstrations (Observa Cuba, 5 July 2022). There were at least 275 repressive actions in [September](#) 2022 alone (Observa Cuba, 04 October 2022). Because this happened right at the end of the WWL 2023 reporting period, details of consequences for the Church are not yet fully analyzed.

Christian leaders are among those suffering from government repression. Several priests and pastors have faced [threats](#) (Facebook post, 23 October 2021), ‘[acts of repudiation](#)’ (Cuba Net, 15 November 2021), [surveillance](#) (Aciprensa, 16 November 2021), arbitrary arrests and abuses as political prisoners, 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). 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.

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](#), for the year 2019, the suicide mortality rate in Cuba (per 100,000 inhabitants) was 14.5 (women: 6; men: 23 per 100,000 inhabitants) (World Bank, Suicide mortality rate, 2019).

## Trends analysis

### 1) Cuban citizens no longer accept an authoritarian Communist model of government

Citizen discontent with the dictatorial Communist regime is becoming increasingly evident - and bolder, as the demonstrations show. The lack of openness towards establishing a new government system with policies that effectively meet the needs of the population, combined with the constant violations of human rights and abuses of power by the government and its supporters, have motivated society to demand radical change.

### 2) The repression against protestors continues

As civil unrest and distrust in the regime have increased, repression has also increased against all those who speak out and organize gatherings to demand respect for human rights and better living conditions. This wave of repression against demonstrations includes the arbitrary detention of protesters, the abusive use of force, acts of intimidation and defamation campaigns.

### 3) The Church has little room to act in the face of government hostilities

The ongoing reduction of space for citizens in society includes the Church. Church leaders and Christian activists are considered enemies of the regime when they speak out against regime abuses and when they support the more vulnerable sectors of society, and are punished accordingly. Despite the absence of guarantees for religious freedom, interdenominational unity and action among Christians has increased.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

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## WWL 2023: 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	46,900	0.7
Catholic	6,126,000	88.3
Protestant	315,000	4.5
Independent	418,000	6.0
Unaffiliated	30,000	0.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,935,900</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	191,000	2.8
Renewalist movement	976,000	14.1

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

**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 2022 estimates, 88.3% of Cuban Christians are Catholics, representing an increase of 1.6% compared to the previous year.

## 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 a Protestant community made up of Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran and Methodist churches. These churches are monitored and face state action if anything opposing Communist ideology is discovered. 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. Others cannot count on the support of the CCC if some of their members are known to be critical of the regime. 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 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. 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 discovered 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 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Cuba

## Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

## Position on the World Watch List

Cuba: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	70	27
WWL 2022	66	37
WWL 2021	62	51
WWL 2020	52	61
WWL 2019	49	59

*Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods*

Significant rises both in violence and in pressure in all *spheres of life* caused the overall score to rise by 4 points. The dictatorial regime intensified its repressive tactics against all Christian leaders and activists opposing Communist principles, especially after the widespread demonstrations. The regime acted likewise against those who participated in other forms of op-

position to Communist rule. Government measures included arrests, abductions, arbitrary fines, close surveillance, denials of licenses and religious visas, and physical/mental abuse.

## 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 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), the ruling Communist Party

has shown support for ideologies that counter Christian values and welcomed actions promoted by radical secularist and LGBT+ groups. It has also increased levels of repression against any Christian community opposing the new legal norms.

### 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 perpetuates the Cuban revolution as a political project and safeguards the need to maintain a system of total monitoring. Such totalitarian control has resulted in years of excessive repression 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 aligning 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 ministry 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

<b>Cuba: Drivers of Persecution</b>	<b>IO</b>	<b>RN</b>	<b>ERH</b>	<b>CO</b>	<b>CDP</b>	<b>CPCO</b>	<b>SI</b>	<b>DPA</b>	<b>OCC</b>
	-	-	-	-	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	-

<b>Cuba:</b>										
<b>Drivers of Persecution</b>	<b>IO</b>	<b>RN</b>	<b>ERH</b>	<b>CO</b>	<b>CDP</b>	<b>CPCO</b>	<b>SI</b>	<b>DPA</b>	<b>OCC</b>	
	-	-	-	-	VERY WEAK	STRONG	MEDIUM	STRONG	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	-	-	

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 agenda of some ideological pressure groups, mostly related to LGBT+ issues. 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 support and encourage action against churches not aligned with regime interests. They defend the regime's Communist principles and sometimes also actively support LGBT+ postulates, especially regarding issues related to sexual education.

- **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)***

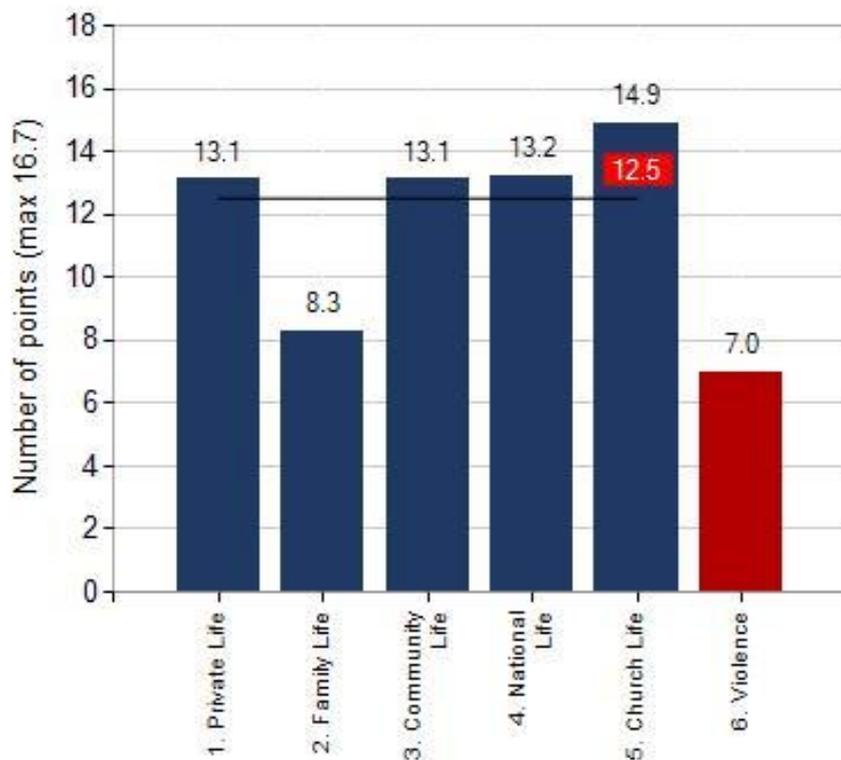
- **Government officials (Strong):** All members of the state apparatus seek to keep the Communist Party in power and impose policies, laws and measures necessary for the regime to exert totalitarian control over everyone living on the island. Hence, officials censor Christian leaders and groups that 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 up denouncing 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 2023 Persecution pattern for Cuba shows (see diagram below):

- The average pressure on Christians in Cuba increased from 12.0 points in WWL 2022 to 12.5 points in WWL 2023.
- Pressure was strongest in the *Church sphere* (14.9 points) and *National sphere* (13.2 points) reflecting the high control and oppression exerted by the dictatorial government and its supporters targeting church activities and Christians.
- The score for violence in WWL 2023 was 7.0 points, a rise from 5.9 points in WWL 2022. There were a greater number of reports of Christians imprisoned, sentenced, abducted, and forced to leave the country.

## WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Cuba



## 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 2023 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://open Doorsanalytical.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 are closely monitored by the state authorities. However, 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 the government;
- denounce corruption and violations of human rights;
- demand greater religious liberty;
- encourage or publicly recognize their participation in antigovernment demonstrations;

- defend Christian values regarding family and marriage contradicting the government's promotion of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) postulates.

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. 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 the media 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 NGO's (especially if they are from the USA). During the WWL 2023 reporting period, there were an increased number of reports of Christians experiencing deliberate telephone, cable and Internet downtime as a show of hostility from the regime to keep them isolated and without the possibility of learning more about their faith from 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 largely restricted for all. However, there is a particular bias against those considered as "opponents or traitors", as is the case with many Church members. This 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 believers inside prisons have also been restricted.

Especially during the protest marches, the authorities aimed to impede the gathering of citizens by (amongst other measures) preventing many from leaving their homes. Christians were also affected by those measures and, additionally, were prevented from attending church services. Church leaders were reportedly blocked from visiting protesters or participating in the marches.

**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 they were intending to participate in 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. The records of arbitrary 'house-arrests' 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 ideology promoted practically deifies Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, worships the Communist revolution and rejects Christian faith (especially where it contradicts SOGI postulates). Such indoctrination is regularly supported by national events where children are obliged to participate. Pupils of Christian parents who oppose this indoctrination face particular pressure from teachers and their peers. Fearing consequences for themselves and their parents, many children avoid expressing 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 allows parents who distance their children from the state's Communist values not only to face intense harassment, but even prison sentences and loss of custody of their children. In addition, the state's promotion of LGBT+ values in schools puts the right of parents to raise their children according to their own convictions and beliefs at risk, because they have no legal means to oppose it. LGBT+ groups have advocated in favor of prohibiting homeschooling due to their interest in promoting their values through mandatory state education.

### **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 be involved in the defense of human rights, biblical principles on family and marriage (in the context of the Family Code referendum) or considered as 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 and other hostilities at school by both teachers 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. It is well known that the government grants subsidies and other benefits (especially, regarding university studies) to those who support the regime and cut all aid to those opposing the ruling party (including family members and children). The US State Department reports in IRFR 2021: "According to media, religious discrimination against students continued to be a common practice in state schools,

with multiple reports of teachers and CCP officials encouraging and participating in bullying of students belonging to religious groups perceived as being critical of the government.”

**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 families. As a result, some family members relocate to stay with relatives in other parts of the country to avoid state harassment. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, all 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, including conversations and gatherings, attempts to travel, house-visits, contact with targeted church leaders, etc. Christians who have expressed faith-based opinions against the regime (including those who participated in 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 (CDR) are the main government informers; their aim is to eliminate the spread of anti-Communist ideas 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 considered regime opponents. Due to the repressive escalation evidenced during WWL 2023, even Christians who have not necessarily been critical 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 schools/universities. University authorities are known to prevent Christian students (especially if they are involved with non-registered churches or targeted church leaders) from continuing their studies to pre-

vent 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 during the WWL 2023 reporting period as part of the reprisals for their (or their parents') participation in the wave of recent protests. This hostility aims to discourage youth involvement in civil society activity.

**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 from church leaders in order to allow them to perform their church activities. 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 properties to house-church communities, or even for their attempt to gather to pray or to religious services offered 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 live) 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*).

In addition, the Immigration 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 and Christians.ch services.

**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; 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; or vi) in general, manifest any kind of opposition to regime activities. Interrogation and summons are commonly used to threaten and intimidate Christian leaders and groups, who have been refused registration, or who are simply considered to be in opposition to the Communist system.

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.

## 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 Decree 370 and Decree 35, and the repressive measures in the New Penal Code. 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, 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, 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", whose mission is to spread rumors to attack the popularity of the religious leader at all costs. By threatening prosecution, the authorities are trying to promote a culture of self-censorship, giving no space to any dissenting voice. Additionally, Christians expressing faith-based opinions in public on issues related to life, family and marriage, have faced fierce opposition from LGBT+ adherents enjoying state support, particularly in the context of the referendum on the Family Code.

### **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 are not allowed to visit, 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. While there have been opportunities for dialogue, any international organization that has any relationship with anti-Communist concepts 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). Due to the greater number of reports of Christians being unfairly and arbitrarily prosecuted in the context of the 2021-2022 protests, many of their relatives and other church leaders have been threatened with serious reprisals if they continue to share information about the situation of the victims with foreign organizations, under the pretext that these actions are considered "subversive activities".

**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. Hence, any Christian political party is legally forbidden. Where civil society faith-based organizations promote 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 or churches viewed as being regime opponents. Those religious organizations are the most vulnerable since any activities they conduct face the risk of being considered illegal (especially where they carry out activities to help citizens claim their rights or when they try to educate them in aspects of democracy and rule of law). In such cases, the authorities react by arresting and prosecuting leaders, expropriating property, imposing excessive fines, and confiscating donations and materials. 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 NGO’s initiate activities related to education or health, they automatically face more impediments since those areas are considered to be state-responsibility only.

**Block 4.15: Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment. (3.75 points)**

The regime has total control over the judicial system and any ruling will always be in the state's favor. Thus, the rights to procedural guarantees for Christians will not be properly safeguarded, including the right to due process. If Christians are brought to court, it is because they are considered rebels, subversives, traitors or opponents and are not treated with equality, impartiality or in accordance with human rights recognized by international bodies. 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.

According to the [December 2022 USCIRF Country Update](#): “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, during the WWL 2023 reporting period, it was known that many political prisoners, including Christians, faced mistreatment and some forms of torture.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

**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 do the labor voluntarily. In general, licenses and authorizations to build 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. As stated in the [USCIRF 2021 report](#): “The Cuban government imposes complicated and repressive requirements on private residences used as places of worship, limiting the ability of Cubans to worship in community.”

**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 known for their opposition to the regime or have given any kind of support to antigovernment 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 is widespread and causes self-censorship, especially when family members have been recruited as informers. During the WWL 2023 reporting period, especially in the case of unregistered churches, monitoring activities were more frequent and intense. Government officials or sympathizers of the regime positively seek political connotations in the preaching to be able to harass the churches with legal prosecution. In an attempt to intimidate them, some church leaders received official visits from members of the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) and the Cuban Communist Party (CCP).

**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. Common practices used against them are:

- prevention from traveling abroad;
- smear campaigns;
- denial of basic services;
- cutting communication lines;
- prevention from meeting with foreigners;
- frequent police summons;
- 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;
- forced exile.

**Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.75 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, in most cases, registration has been denied on the grounds 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, many churches are considered illegal because their registration has been denied, 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 hinders any official training of church leaders etc.

As 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. Registered churches also face difficulties when their activities are not deemed to be in line with regime interests. Thus, IRFR 2021 states: "Religious groups reported the ORA and MOJ continued to deny official registration to certain groups, including to several Apostolic churches, or did not respond to long-pending applications (...)."

## 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 5 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.

**3. For further discussion** (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

**4. The use of symbolic numbers:** In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

**5. The symbol "x" in the table:** This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

<b>Cuba: Violence Block question</b>	<b>WWL 2023</b>	<b>WWL 2022</b>
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	7	7
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	80	44
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?	12	4
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10	0
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)?	18	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?	3	2
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?	0	0
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	55	1

In the WWL 2023 reporting period:

- **Christians arrested (80):** Most arrests involved Christians (from various denominations) being arbitrarily detained as a reprisal for their participation in or support of the 2021-2022 antigovernment demonstrations. Also, there were cases when Christians were detained to prevent their attendance at church services.
- **Christians sentenced (12):** 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 demanding more freedom in society.
- **Christians abducted (10):** This category includes the cases of Christians being illegally held (without following any apparent legal procedure) or taken by state officers for many hours or days in poor conditions with the aim of preventing their participation in antigovernment demonstrations, their attendance at church services or with the aim of discouraging their humanitarian projects.
- **Christians forced to leave the country (55):** Church leaders and other Christians not only faced continuous threats and harassment, many were directly ordered to leave the country.

## 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.

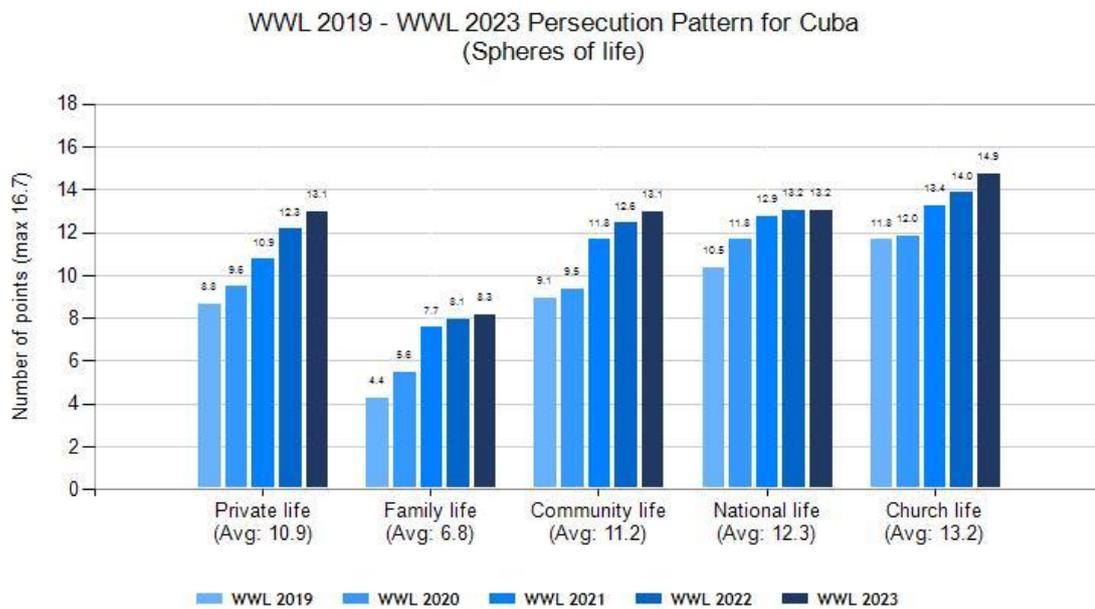
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Cuba: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	12.5
2022	12.0

2021	11.3
2020	9.7
2019	8.9

The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians has consistently been above 8.9 points and has steadily risen over the last five reporting periods, reaching its highest level in WWL 2023.

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

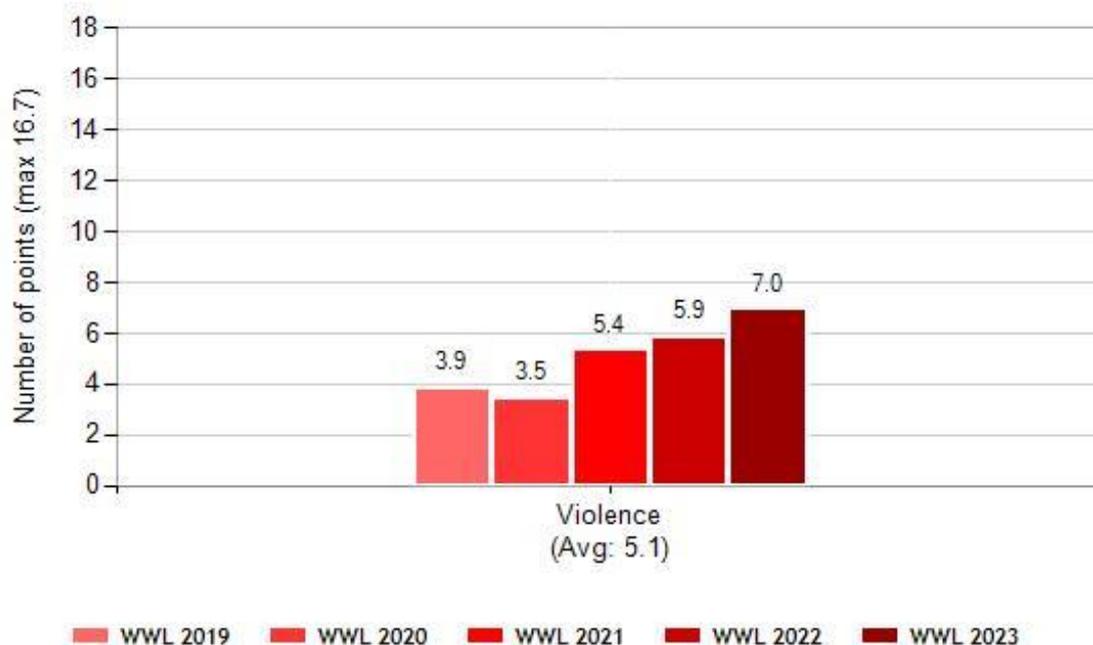


The last five reporting periods show a general trend of increasing pressure in all spheres of life. The most significant levels of pressure can be seen in *Church*, *Community*, *Private* and *National* life. This reflects the way the government is trying to systematically silence those within the churches 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 was more or less stable during the first 2 reporting periods but has risen sharply since WWL 2021. 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. In recent months the number of abductions, court sentences and expulsions from the country has increased.

### WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Cuba (Violence)



### Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied/restricted healthcare; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
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 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 ([Radio Television Marti, 3 August 2022](#)).

Women involved in antigovernment activism are typically fired from their jobs, 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). In addition to beatings, members have also been arrested and detained for short periods of time.

Due to the historical repression of religion in Cuba, especially Christianity, it is challenging for women to form stable families. Christian women and girls are 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 materials.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Denied/restricted healthcare; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
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 explained: “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 threatened and incarcerated in [inhumane prison conditions](#), evidenced by the treatment of Yandier García Labrada (CubaNet, 28 July 2021; CubaNet, 13 December 2021).

The number of detentions has risen significantly following the July 2021 protests, where many Christians – particularly young men – were arbitrarily arrested and have received sentences of up to 20 years ([The Guardian, 15 February 2022](#)). Several demonstrators remained missing months later and hundreds more were still awaiting their verdicts in September 2021 ([Aleteia, 21 September 2021](#)).

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. Reflecting on recent protests over [Hurricane Ian blackouts](#), one country expert revealed the violation of conscience experienced by young Christian men “who not only had to carry weapons under threat but also had to intimidate the protesters with them, despite the fact that they considered that they were protesting for just causes that coincided with their Christian values.” 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 reported: “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 the violation of human rights on the island is discussed.”

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "The Global Liberty Alliance reported authorities continued to subject Free Yorubas leaders and members to additional arbitrary detentions, threats, fines, physical violence, and verbal harassment. According to observers, although Yoruba and other African syncretic religious groups were given latitude to practice their beliefs as individuals, the government selectively recognized groups and leaders based on their favorable view of the government. The NGO reported that in March [2021], security forces beat and robbed a Free Yorubas youth leader, Dairon Hernandez Perez, outside his home as he returned from attending a religious event."
- "Muslim community representatives said the country's small Muslim community was subject to discrimination. The government denied a Muslim woman permission to travel abroad for urgent medical care, a decision she said she believed was linked to her affiliation with an unregistered religious group. According to CSW, Yusdevlin Olivera Nunez was prohibited from travelling due to a five-year sentence of restricted liberty she received upon joining the unregistered Cuban Association for the Dissemination of Islam. At year's end [2021], Olivera Nunez – known as Mercy Olivera – had not received travel documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She said the treatment needed for her medical conditions was not available in the country."
- "Jehovah's Witnesses leaders continued to state they found the requirements for university admission and the courses of study incompatible with the group's beliefs because their religion prohibited them from political involvement."

According to the [USCIRF 2022 Annual Report](#) (Page 49):

- In the Santería community, at least five members of the independent and unregistered Free Yoruba Association of Cuba (Asociación de Yorubas Libres de Cuba or “Free Yorubas”) were detained for their participation in the protests, while others were fined. Donaida Pérez

Paseiro, President of the Free Yorubas, and Loreto Hernández García, the community's vice president, were detained and charged with "public disorder," "disobedience," "spreading the epidemic," and "incitement."

- USCIRF received reports in January 2022 indicating that Paseiro and Hernández García were on trial at that time. Prosecutors were reportedly seeking eight years imprisonment for both of them.

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

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

The Communist regime continues to cling to power despite clear citizen dissatisfaction. Indeed, acts of harassment and surveillance against any opposition voice are likely to increase. Faced with this situation, Christians will almost certainly continue to be frequent victims of acts of intimidation at various levels, especially where they publicly speak out against state injustice. State repression occurs in practice with acts that violate human rights, but also through a supposed adjustment of the legal framework that aims to give legitimacy to the regime's actions against those who do not align with the ruling party's principles and interests. It is hoped that international concern over the situation in the country will help promote positive change in Cuban society.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Block 4.15: Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment. (3.75 points): December 2022 USCIRF Country Update: - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/2022%20Cuba%20Country%20Update.pdf>
- 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): USCIRF 2021 report - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Cuba.pdf>
- 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>
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## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

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