

Real Change for Cuba? How Citizens View Their Country's Future

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Special Report



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Executive Summary

In September 2010, Cuban president Raul Castro announced the beginning of sweeping economic reforms, including the elimination of a million public sector jobs, the easing of restrictions on private enterprise, and the first Communist Party Congress since 1997. To explore what Cubans think about the announced reforms, Freedom House conducted in-depth interviews with 120 people in six provinces from December 2010 to January 2011. These interviews also assessed access to information and technology on the island, and explored Cubans' values and beliefs, which Freedom House compared with the findings from other countries in the World Values Survey study.

The results of this study indicate that despite hopes that the reforms will benefit Cuba, many do not believe they will personally benefit. Cubans continue to struggle to survive on a daily basis and are preoccupied by the need to feed their families, pay debts, and find work. When asked to describe their economic situation, the most common adjective used was "*apretado*" (tight). Cubans want to see economic reforms that will increase wages, lower prices, and make basic goods and services more available. Many younger Cubans would like to start a family but are unable to afford to live on their own, let alone raise children. As a young salesperson in Havana said, "If I don't have enough to support just myself, what will it be like if I have a family?" The poor state of Cuba's transportation system further isolates Cubans, particularly those in rural areas.

While there is some indication that outright repression on the island has lessened slightly, Cubans are still subjected to a variety of restrictions on freedom of expression, private enterprise, and freedom of movement. Cubans are reluctant to complain in public, yet often criticize the government in private. Private businesses such as *casas particulares* (family homes that rent out a room) are subjected to hefty taxes and fined for minor infractions. A *casa particular* owner in Villa Clara, for example, claimed, "Everyone watches you here. If it's not the government, it's the neighbors who immediately alert the authorities when someone arrives." Although the Cuban government opened tourist areas to Cubans in 2008, the high cost of entry means few are able to take advantage of the facilities or services, such as the internet, offered at these sites. A resident of Villa Clara acknowledged, "It's an achievement by the government. But who does it serve? The tourists and not the Cuban people. Before we couldn't even enter; now we can, but how are we going to do that if everything is in CUC [*pesos convertibles*, or convertible peso])?"

Additionally, Cubans continue to need official permission to travel or move between provinces, as well as to leave the country. A respondent from Villa Clara explained how Cubans are required to have work licenses or certificates in order to exchange places with a family member in another province. Also, several respondents spoke of their efforts to leave the country either by acquiring a Cuban exit visa or gaining citizenship from another country and subsequently obtaining a non-Cuban passport. Separately, the July 2010 prisoner release negotiation was also initially hailed as reform, yet almost all of those released were forced to accept exile in countries such as Spain and the United States, prompting critics to argue that the Cuban government was using the prisoner release to physically remove the opposition from the island.

Cubans have reacted to the economic reforms announced in September 2010 with a mix of anxiety and optimism. Many worry that prices will rise, making daily life even more difficult.

Some, such as a medical school graduate in Pinar del Rio, explained that they were unsure how the reforms would affect their families, but that they were sure the Cuban authorities would implement them correctly. In a country where several generations often live together, many also fear the loss of social assistance such as ration booklets and assistance for the elderly. A teacher in Havana told of how prices have already begun to rise steeply for basic services that used to be subsidized, such as haircuts, while a handicraft vendor in Santa Clara declared, "They're going to throw us out of our jobs, and then on top of that they're cheating the elderly. I have to take care of my in-laws. With what? It can't be like this." Despite the strong concern about bread and butter issues, however, Cubans also seem to desire a greater degree of fundamental freedoms. Increasing freedom of expression was considered by those interviewed as the second most important goal for the country, and freedom of movement was also mentioned frequently, particularly by younger Cubans.

Many, however, are still skeptical that true reform can ever occur while a Castro is still in power, and do not anticipate any real change in the next 12 months. "Nothing really changes in Cuba," explained a former prostitute from Havana.

The majority of Cubans obtain news through word-of-mouth, television, radio, and newspapers. Cubans have little faith in the credibility of state-controlled news sources, and although independent sources are considered more credible, the majority of Cubans are unable to access them. For example, a 30-year-old woman from Santiago recounted an opportunity she once had to look at well-known blogger Yoani Sanchez's blog *Generación Y*. Upon discovering that the blog commented only on daily shortages and other things that all Cubans experienced and already knew about, she expressed confusion about why it was blocked. "Why so much fuss about nothing?!" she exclaimed. Overall, there is a low level of interest in following local news, and even less interest in following international news. Internet and e-mail use, along with cell phone use, remains low as a result of high costs, low accessibility, and fears of being monitored by authorities.

Although relatively isolated from each other and the outside world, Cubans nevertheless hold fairly progressive social values, particularly relating to opinions on divorce, homosexuality, and abortion. The values questions in this study derive from the World Values Survey (WVS) questionnaire and were used to compare Cuba with other countries. The WVS employs an analytical framework to study two value dimensions. The first dimension differentiates between values that emphasize religious beliefs, hierarchical authority, and the role of traditional family values from a set of secular and rational values. The second dimension differentiates between a culture of scarcity, in which emphasis is placed on physical and physiological security, and a culture of subjective well-being. The study results suggest that Cubans lean more toward liberal social values (secular and rational) in the first dimension, and toward survival values (driven by a culture of scarcity) in the second dimension, indicating that Cuba is more similar in its social and economic values to other post-Communist countries than to its Latin American counterparts.

Introduction

In the more than three years that have passed since Raul Castro was appointed president of the Republic of Cuba in February 2008, there have been significant changes in both Cuba's domestic workings and its international relationships. In March 2009, just over a year after taking office, Raul Castro placed his stamp firmly on the government by abruptly removing from office Vice President Carlos Lage and Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, both prominent *Fidelistas* (supporters of Fidel Castro). Since then, he has continued to tighten control over the country's leadership and remove internal dissenters, placing allies and family members in key positions. Regarding economic policy, the Cuban president has announced wide-ranging reforms that incorporate characteristics of capitalist tendencies, such as allowing Cubans to own small businesses, while simultaneously reducing long-standing state subsidies such as ration cards and announcing plans to eliminate a million public sector jobs. Cuba's economy, however, remains crippled from the 2008 hurricanes and an overall drop in tourism levels resulting from the global economic downturn. Socially, little improvement has been made; the government continues to harass and detain opponents, albeit for short periods, and fear of openly criticizing the regime remains high.

Cuba's relationships with the international community appeared to be improving throughout 2009, with recently elected U.S. President Barack Obama and a Democrat-controlled U.S. Congress clearly willing to ease U.S. legal restrictions and establish warmer communications between the two countries. The Organization of American States repealed its 1962 resolution suspending Cuba's membership, and Cuba reached important strategic agreements on oil and telecommunications with Venezuela, Brazil, Spain, China, and Russia. Cuba continued to align itself with other left-wing governments in Latin America as part of the Alliance for the Americas, while in Europe, Spain headed a coalition seeking to change the European Common Position (ECP) restricting European interactions with Cuba.

The budding international goodwill soon ended, however, with the December 2009 detention of U.S. contractor Alan Gross in Cuba and the 2010 election of a Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives, effectively stalling any thaw in U.S.-Cuban relations. In the summer of 2010, Cuba entered into negotiations with the Cuban Catholic Church and the Spanish government, and eventually agreed to release all 75 prisoners from the 2003 Black Spring, many of them into exile in Spain. This apparent act of goodwill, however, ultimately proved too little to persuade the European Union that Cuba had rectified its human rights situation, and the ECP was not reversed.

During the first year of Raul Castro's presidency, Freedom House conducted field research in two phases to assess the opinions and perceptions of ordinary Cubans regarding the economic reforms the Cuban president had announced in 2008 and the prospects for change in Cuba. Based on data from the first field research phase, conducted in April 2008, Freedom House released a report showing that the lives of Cubans were relatively unaffected by the announced reforms.¹ Data from the second field research phase, conducted in September and October 2008,

¹ The Freedom House report, *Change in Cuba: How Citizens View Their Country's Future* (September 14, 2008), is available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=383&report=69>

resulted in a second Freedom House report showing that, six months later, most Cubans still felt relatively little impact from the proposed reforms and continued to struggle with daily needs.²

The September 2010 announcement that a million public sector jobs would be eliminated and the subsequent holding of the first Communist Party Congress since 1997³ indicate that Cuba may be on the brink of unprecedented changes; or, alternatively, that these reforms, like so many others announced in the past, will ultimately end up only marginally impacting ordinary Cubans. The party congress in April 2011 addressed a wide range of economic and other issues, including the gradual phasing out of ration books, increasing private sector employment, permitting the sale of houses and cars, and expanding Cubans' ability to travel abroad. Following the party congress, the government issued 313 guidelines for shaping the economic reforms; however, it did not specify how the reforms would be implemented. Given the lack of non-state generated information on the economic reforms, Freedom House set out for a third time to gauge Cubans' perspectives and opinions on the impending reforms. At the same time, research sought to assess the use of technology on the island and to explore broader themes of social values. The study of Cuban social values represents an initial effort to assess the views of Cubans within a regional and international context, comparing Cuban society for the first time with other Latin American and post-communist countries. Additionally, a deeper understanding of Cuban social values will provide students and followers of Cuba with a more nuanced understanding of how to approach relations with Cuba, and how to anticipate what a post-Castro Cuba might look like.

Field research took place from December 13, 2010, to January 21, 2011. It explored four overarching questions:

1. Overall, how satisfied and happy are Cubans?
2. What are Cubans' basic values and beliefs?
3. How often and through what means do Cubans communicate and access information?
4. What are the effects of the reforms introduced by Raul Castro's government?

Responses taken from 120 in-person interviews in six provinces are presented in this report. The interviews solicited the views of Cubans from various backgrounds and geographic locations, and explored topics never before addressed in surveys conducted in Cuba.⁴

² The Freedom House report, *Another 'Special Period' in Cuba? How Citizens View Their Country's Future* (March 25, 2009), is available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=383&report=78>

³ The Sixth Communist Party Congress took place April 16–19, 2011.

⁴ Only a handful of independent surveys have been conducted in Cuba. A survey conducted by Solidaridad Espanola con Cuba in 2005 had 541 respondents in 13 of Cuba's 14 provinces. ("Primera encuesta de opinión pública en Cuba: 5 Diciembre 2005." <http://www.solidaridadconcuba.com/noticias/encuesta.htm>.) The Gallup Poll survey conducted in 2006 included 1,000 residents from Havana and Santiago. ("Just One in Four Urban Cubans Satisfied with Personal Freedoms," December 18, 2006. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/25915/Just-One-Four-Urban-Cubans-Satisfied-Personal-Freedoms.aspx>.) The International Republican Institute (IRI) has conducted several opinion polls, including a 2007 poll in which 584 respondents from all 14 provinces were interviewed. ("Cuban Public Opinion Survey: September 5–October 4, 2007."

<http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2007%20October%2019%20Survey%20of%20Cuban%20Public%20Opinion,%20September%205-October%204,%202007%20--%20English%20version.pdf>), and two opinion polls in 2008, interviewing 587 number of Cubans in all 14 provinces in the first poll ("Cuban Public Opinion Survey: March 14–April 12, 2008."

<http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2008%20June%205%20Survey%20of%20Cuban%20Public%20Opinion,%20March%2014-April%2012,%202008.pdf>), and 592 Cubans from all 14 provinces in the second ("Cuban Public

Methodology

In December 2010 and January 2011,⁵ Freedom House sent five field researchers to Cuba to conduct qualitative in-person interviews on topics related to Cuban society, economy, and technology. Field research began three months after Raul Castro announced major economic reforms and scheduled the Sixth Communist Party Congress for April 2011. Researchers were able to observe the degree to which Cubans were aware of both the reforms and the congress, and to what extent they had experienced, or expected to experience, changes as a result of the reforms.

The methodology consisted of informal, semi-structured interviews conducted face to face. The questionnaire contained 38 questions, some open-ended and some requiring a simple affirmative or negative response, and all asked in conversational style. Two questions on personal happiness were asked, along with four questions specifically covering the impact of economic reforms on Cubans. Fourteen questions were also posed covering how Cubans obtain information and what technology they use. Eighteen questions were selected to replicate or resemble those of major international studies, such as the World Values Survey, which has been conducted in almost 100 countries over the last 30 years, and the Latinobarómetro study, a set of surveys conducted annually in 18 countries of Latin America. Neither of these polling organizations has been permitted to independently conduct polls in Cuba. Specific questions from each of these surveys were incorporated into the questionnaire in order to collect data that could indicate what the results of these surveys would be if they were conducted openly in Cuba. While this methodology cannot fully replace or substitute for the original surveys, the data gathered provides an opportunity to evaluate Cubans within the regional and global context provided by these surveys.

The questions touched on broad themes covering different aspects of daily life in Cuba, including:

- Overall states of life satisfaction and happiness
- Expectations for change and views about the future
- Family and social values
- The use and prevalence of technology
- Access to and dissemination of information
- Opinions on the economic reforms

Opinion Survey: November 8–30, 2008”

<http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2009%20January%2014%20Survey%20of%20Cuban%20Public%20Opinion.%20November%208-30.%202008%20--%20English%20version.pdf>). Freedom House conducted qualitative interviews in April and September/October 2008, interviewing 180 and 160 Cubans, respectively, in five provinces. Most recently, IRI conducted a public opinion poll in 2009 in which 432 Cubans in 12 provinces were interviewed (“Cuban Public Opinion Survey: July 4–August 7, 2009.” <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2009-November-17-Survey-of-Cuban-Public-Opinion-July-4-August-7-2009.pdf>) as well as in 2011 with 463 respondents in 12 provinces (“Cuban Public Opinion Survey: January 28–February 10, 2011.” <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2011%20April%20Cuba%20Poll%20Final%20Survey%20Slide%20Presentation.pdf>).

⁵ Field research took place between December 13, 2010, and January 21, 2011.

Researchers visited 6 of Cuba's 14 provinces: Ciudad de la Habana,⁶ Villa Clara, Holguín, Camagüey, Pinar del Río, and Santiago de Cuba. Researchers traveled extensively within their respective provinces in order to capture views from a cross-section of respondents. These provinces span the diversity of the island's regions: east and west, coastal and interior, commercial and agricultural, and urban and rural (see *Appendix 1* for more information on the provinces and interview locations).

Researchers conducted a total of 120 interviews, combining qualitative techniques and quantitative coding. A true random sampling of the adult population in Cuba is virtually impossible to obtain under current conditions, so researchers were instead provided with demographic target percentages for gender, age, and urban/rural location in order to capture a set of respondents that generally reflects Cuba's demographic diversity.⁷

The results reported here are based on the unweighted aggregate responses to the questions and represent a good approach, in lieu of standard survey methodology, to identifying the basic values and beliefs of Cuban citizens. As such, this study offers a major opportunity to compare citizen responses on the island with survey items that have been asked in many other countries.

Respondents included both men and women between the ages of 17 and 80, with an average age of 37.⁸ Approximately 46 percent of the interviewees were 30 years old or younger; 36 percent were between the ages of 31 and 50, and 18 percent were over the age of 50. These percentages reflected Freedom House's decision to focus on the views of the younger generations. Additionally, the sample was racially, socioeconomically, and geographically diverse,⁹ although slightly more men than women were interviewed and the sample heavily favored Cubans from urban areas.¹⁰

Each age group included Cubans from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Respondents included students, bartenders, teachers, housewives, doctors, musicians, health technicians, *cuentapropistas*,¹¹ artists, tour guides, writers and editors, taxi drivers, military

⁶ Cuba has two provinces containing the name "Habana." Ciudad de la Habana refers to the capital city and its surroundings. In this report it is referred to simply as "Havana." La Habana Province is a province south of the capital. For the purpose of clarity, this province is referred to as "Havana Province."

⁷ Demographic target percentages were as follows. Gender—men: 50 percent; women: 50 percent. Age (deliberately skewed to focus more on the youth population)—18 to 30: 50 percent; 31 to 50: 30 percent; 50+: 20 percent. Location—urban: 65 percent; rural: 35 percent. Actual demographic percentages obtained were as follows. Gender—men: 57.5 percent; women: 42.5 percent. Age—18 to 30: 45.8 percent; 31 to 50: 35.9 percent; 50+: 18.3 percent. Location—urban: 89.2 percent; rural: 7.5 percent; other: 3.3 percent.

⁸ The most recent census data available from Cuba (2002) states the national median age at 35.1 years. Full results from the census can be found at: http://www.cubagob.cu/otras_info/censo/index.htm

⁹ 60 percent of respondents were identified by researchers as being of European/white ethnicity, 20 percent as being Afro-Cuban, 24 percent as mulatto, and 4 percent as belonging to some other ethnic category. Approximately 41 percent of interviewees were identified (either through self-identification or through researcher deduction) as Catholic, 19 percent were not religious, 15 percent were atheist, 3 percent practiced *Santería*, and 13 percent ascribed to some other form of religion.

¹⁰ Approximately 42 percent of those interviewed were located in Havana, 17 percent in Pinar del Río, 14 percent in Villa Clara, 14 percent in Santiago, 7 percent in Camagüey, and 6 percent in Holguín. Many respondents commented that agriculture has been largely ignored by the state and that the younger generation prefers to live in the city.

¹¹ *Cuentapropistas* is the term popularly used in Cuba to refer to those active in the self-employed small-business sector legalized in the early 1990s. Raul Castro's announced reforms include a dramatic expansion of

personnel, engineers, professors, farmers, office administrators, hairdressers, mechanics, construction workers, social workers, Communist Youth members, hotel workers, and the unemployed.

Education levels varied, with some respondents holding doctoral degrees and others without a university education. Although 50 percent of interviewees identified themselves as professionals, only 25 percent were actually working in the occupations for which they had trained. Many respondents also indicated that their occupations failed to provide adequate wages, resulting in the need for a second job, such as a tour guide for foreigners, or work through the informal economy and illegal private businesses to make ends meet.

Interviews were conducted as conversations, and researchers were careful to conduct interviews in locations conducive to private conversation while at the same time maintaining an informal atmosphere. Researchers began the interview with questions about basic background information, such as where the respondent lived and worked, as well as questions about family and interests. The conversation would then flow to other topics and the researcher would weave the questions from this study into the conversation, creating a natural flow from one topic to the next.

Researchers took into account the challenges of obtaining truthful answers to questions in a highly repressive environment. In a country full of *chivatos* (informants), Cubans are unaccustomed to expressing their views openly. Communist Party members in particular are unlikely to admit any skepticism they may have about the government, while *jineteros* (hustlers) are apt to say anything they think will help them get money from a tourist. Researchers were therefore trained to recognize whether an environment would be more conducive to obtaining “free” answers, and select interview locations accordingly. Researchers acknowledged that responses may have been biased by the environment, and that this bias may have produced responses different than those expected.¹²

Values and Beliefs: Introduction to the World Values Survey

Since many of the questions in this study derive from the World Values Survey (WVS) questionnaire, it is worthwhile to briefly describe the main findings and arguments derived from that major comparative survey. WVS scholars have developed an analytical framework based on two theoretically driven and empirically tested value dimensions. One dimension differentiates a

cuentalpropistas, although those who already have their own business have had to resort to both the formal and informal economy to survive. Many respondents also complained that the high cost of obtaining a license and paying taxes on earnings means that few believe this will be a viable option.

¹² The classic theory "Spiral of Silence," developed by German public opinion researcher Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, helps in understanding that people in a repressive environment adjust their responses to a perceived majoritarian preference or commonly accepted "truth." Such responses reflect a "social desirability bias". Social desirability varies from one society to another, and reflects the predominant values in that society. For example, what is socially desirable in Cuba may not be socially desirable in Sweden, and vice versa. Questions on values, therefore, reflect to a certain degree the cultural environment and are less subject to response bias. Questions about reform and government in a repressive society, however, are more likely to result in respondents being worried about their response. Although researchers cannot determine the extent of “truthfulness” in responses, they can be aware of the environment and take measures to help the respondent feel more confident.

set of values that emphasize religious beliefs, hierarchical authority, and the role of traditional family values, from a set of secular and rational values that reflect the process of modernization in society.

According to this dimension, some societies emphasize obedience, religious faith, and respect for authority as important values to teach children (traditional views), whereas other societies stress the importance of responsibility, independence, or determination (more modern views). The traditional versus secular/rational dimension reflects many of the claims made by Modernization theorists in the 1950s and 1960s about value change in society, which takes place as societies undergo a process of cognitive mobilization that parallels structural modernization. However, much of the value change observed during the 1980s and 1990s cannot be explained simply with modernization arguments, and so a second value dimension is employed.

The second value dimension derived from the WVS surveys reflects an antagonism of values that can be described generally as a culture of scarcity on the one hand, where emphasis is placed on physical and physiological security, and, on the other hand, a culture guided by a broad sense of subjective well-being. The literature based on the WVS refers to these sets of values as survival and self-expression values, respectively. Returning, for example, to what societies consider to be the most important values to teach their children, a survival-driven culture tends to emphasize hard work and thrift, whereas a self-expressive culture gives more importance to qualities such as imagination, tolerance, and respect for others.

These two dimensions have made it possible to locate a significant number of countries on what is known as the Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map of the World.¹³ In the first value dimension, countries such as Nigeria and Guatemala tend to be on the traditional pole, while Germany is located on the rational-secular pole. Regarding the survival/self-expression dimension, countries such as Russia, Romania, and Iraq appear on the scarcity values end, whereas Canada and Australia are placed on the self-expression/well-being end. Tolerance of diversity is, for example, highly valued in the latter countries, including sexual diversity. Generally, the location of the various countries is highly correlated with the level of socioeconomic development. Richer countries tend to be on the modern/self-expressive quadrant of the map, and poorer countries on the traditional and survival values quadrant.

While one objective of this report is to locate Cuba on the Cultural Map of the World, this report will first discuss the principal research findings concerning Cuban opinions about daily life, restrictions on society, structural changes and a potential timeline for that change, youth, the Catholic Church, the future, information sources, and the use of technology.

Research Findings

Daily Concerns

As in previous Freedom House studies, Cubans across all regions and sectors of society remain largely preoccupied by their economic situation, with most struggling to make ends meet. When asked about their economic situation, many respondents replied that things were “*apretado*,” or

¹³ See Appendix 3.

tight. Many of those interviewed had not been able to earn a living in the areas in which they had studied and had either taken on a second job, often as a tour guide or selling handicrafts in street markets, or changed occupations entirely. A manager of two *casas particulares*¹⁴ in Villa Clara, for example, recounted how he had originally studied to be an engineer. “I used to work for a government company but I earned 28 dollars a month, that didn’t cover anything so now I have to run two homes,” he explained. Many of the *casa particular* owners confided that obtaining food for guests was often difficult. “Everything is done through the black market,” said one.¹⁵ A few Cubans did say their monthly income was sufficient. A 65-year-old peanut seller in Havana (who recently obtained her peanut-selling license in October 2010) showed a researcher her full grocery bag to prove her monthly wages were enough. The wages were not, however, solely from selling peanuts, as she also unofficially rented out a room in her apartment to foreigners.

The economic reforms announced by President Raul Castro in September 2010 contributed to a general feeling of uncertainty. Almost all of those interviewed were aware of the reforms, although to varying degrees. Several mentioned that they had not bothered to read the document distributed by the government that outlined the reforms, saying with a shrug that the decision had already been made and they had no option but to accept it. Complaints were widespread that salaries in general are too low and prices too high, and that food shortages are common. One interview was conducted while walking around Holguín in search of a lemon to put in a cup of tea; the lemon was never found, and the respondent, a 58-year-old construction worker, commented bitterly about the “*comuniston*”¹⁶ behavior of many tourists. “It’s very easy to defend the [Cuban] Revolution when you have a set date for returning to your country. We have to ask permission to leave; they come and go without problems.”

The dual currency remains, as in past Freedom House studies, a point of contention, and many respondents hoped that the economic reforms would result in its elimination. A musician from Camagüey explained the difficulty the dual currency creates for many Cubans, telling of the process he had to go through to import instruments, all of which had to be paid for in *pesos convertibles*, or CUCs,¹⁷ while he was still paid with the *moneda nacional*, a currency worth 28 times less than the CUC.

Economic concerns also influence many Cubans’ decisions to start a family. Many younger respondents indicated they would like to start a family but did not have the money to afford a house of their own, let alone raise a child. “If I don’t have enough to support just myself, what will it be like if I have a family?” said a 27-year-old salesperson in Havana while talking about

¹⁴ A *casa particular* (a private house) refers to a family home that has a room available for rent to tourists. Cubans can rent out up to two extra rooms with a legal license, but many operate unlicensed *casas*. *Casas particulares* offer tourists an alternative to the more expensive hotels and are often the only option in smaller towns and rural areas of the island.

¹⁵ Purchasing goods through the black market, or “*mercado negro*,” is often the only way Cubans can find basic supplies.

¹⁶ *Comuniston* is a derogatory term used to describe foreign (non-Cuban) supporters of the regime “who wouldn’t survive a month living like a Cuban.”

¹⁷ The CUC, or Cuban convertible peso, is pegged to the U.S. dollar and is one of two official currencies in Cuba. It is worth 28 times more than the *moneda nacional*, the currency in which most Cubans are paid. All foreigners must exchange their foreign currency for CUC through an official currency exchange office that guarantees Cuban government control over foreign currencies that enter Cuba.

his desire to have children. The same was heard in every province. For example, a young musician in Santa Clara was thrilled by the birth of his first daughter, but was quick to add, “She will be the only one. Things are difficult here (*La cosa es difícil acá*), one is enough, and too much.”

In addition to economic and family concerns, several respondents mentioned a recent rise in violent crime, as opposed to petty thefts, although Cuba prides itself on low rates of violence. This response is in stark contrast to previous Freedom House studies in which low crime rates were mentioned as one of the advantages to living in Cuba. Different reasons were offered to explain the increase, ranging from extreme boredom (“Young people have nothing to do, so stabbing people is their entertainment”) to total apathy toward work and the aims of the Revolution.

Similar to past Freedom House studies, many complained about the dilapidated state of transportation in the country and pointed to corollary issues that this creates. “The ones who suffer most are those who live in the countryside, because many of them are marginalized from health care due to distance,” commented a young hospital worker in Santa Clara. “What does it matter to have advanced so far in health care if, because of transportation problems, people can’t get to it?” Researchers also encountered Cubans who felt it necessary to take the more expensive Viazul buses that cater to tourists, given the unreliability of the regular national public transportation buses.

When asked what made them most happy, almost half the respondents replied their family, followed by a quarter who indicated their profession. Free education, health care, and low crime rates were more frequently mentioned as the main source of happiness in previous Freedom House studies, possibly pointing to shifting attitudes toward these services. Additionally, despite the numerous problems encountered in daily life, the majority of respondents said they were relatively happy.

Restrictions on Society

Complaints about restrictions were virtually the same as in previous Freedom House reports. Respondents would often lower their voices when talking about the government or ask to move to a more private area. “You can’t say anything against the government here,” said one. One 34-year-old chef in Havana, however, told loud, dark jokes about the Castros in the middle of the sidewalk, indicating that fear, at least among some, may be diminishing.

The Cuban government continues to heavily punish regime critics or those who do not comply with economic restrictions. Respondents exhibited extremely high levels of distrust, fostered by the constant fear of denouncement by neighbors to authorities. For example, a male respondent from Villa Clara told of a 500 CUC fine he had received for not alerting authorities in time of a client who had stayed at his *casa particular*. “Everyone watches you here,” he said. “If it’s not the government, it’s the neighbors who immediately alert the authorities when someone arrives.” One *casa particular* owner in Havana requested that guests not go up to the roof, fearing that authorities would think he was illegally renting out a third space and fine him.

Tolerance of the black market has not increased, although it was widely acknowledged by those interviewed that food shortages made purchasing supplies through the black market necessary in order to subsist. When guests arrive at a *casa particular*, neighbors and friends would stop by in the early morning to secretly sell food that might be needed. In some cases, the Cuban family that owns the *casa particular* will eat the same meals as the guest, enabling them to eat items they could not otherwise afford. The situation is similar to that found in the 2008 Freedom House report and slightly less restrictive than in the 2009 report, as many items and services are only available or affordable through the black market but repercussions for being caught selling or purchasing them remain harsh. Owners of *casas particulares* or *cuentas propias* recounted that they faced large fines or imprisonment if they could not produce, upon demand, proof that goods or food were purchased legally. “Cuba is the only country in the world that tries to have gastronomy with no ingredients,” quipped a scuba instructor in Pinar del Rio.

Several interviewees expressed frustration with restrictions on freedom of movement, particularly those who lived outside of Havana. Cubans are prohibited from relocating between provinces without official permission, and must obtain an exit visa to leave the country. This issue was raised in previous Freedom House studies, primarily within the context of youth wishing they had the means to leave the island. In the current study, however, frustration was also voiced with restrictions on internal movement. As one respondent from Villa Clara explained, “In order to go to Havana, you have to have a work license or a certificate allowing you to exchange places with a family member.” Another respondent, also from Villa Clara, had worked out a plan to earn more money by leaving the hospital at which he worked to be a coco-taxi driver in Havana, all of which had been arranged for him by a cousin who worked in the government. “That’s how you do these things,” he said. Many respondents expressed a desire to leave Cuba, either permanently or simply to see other places.

Raul Castro’s government lifted restrictions in 2008 on Cubans staying at tourist hotels and entering areas specifically designated for tourists. The change has meant little for the majority of Cubans, as they are still unable to pay the CUC prices charged to enter these areas, and generally was not mentioned by respondents in this or previous Freedom House reports. However, a researcher visiting a boardwalk area in Santa Clara frequented by tourists had to pay 5 CUC just to enter the compound. His Cuban guide, while discussing the excellent condition of the bridge and road, added that “[effectively], it’s an achievement by the government. But who does it serve? The tourists and not the Cuban people. Before we couldn’t even enter; now we can, but how are we going to do that if everything is in CUC?” The greatest opportunity for change this could have provided is perhaps the ability for ordinary Cubans to access the internet through the hotels, although very few of the interviewees indicated they use computers at hotels to access the internet, and the high prices are generally prohibitive. In addition, a respondent in Havana said Cubans are still kicked out of ETECSA¹⁸ offices when trying to use the internet, even though there are no laws against Cubans accessing the internet at ETECSA offices.

Additionally, in July 2010, Cuba agreed to release 52 political prisoners after negotiations with the Cuban Catholic Church and the Spanish government, the largest prisoner release on the island in decades. The 52 were all part of the Group of 75 political prisoners who were arrested during the Black Spring of 2003 crackdown on political dissent. The last remaining members of

¹⁸ ETECSA is an acronym for Empresa Telecomunicaciones de Cuba, S.A. (Cuban Telecommunications Company, S.A.). ETECSA provides telephone, internet, and wireless services to both Cubans and tourists.

this group, the majority of whom were exiled to Spain or the United States, were released in April 2011. Although the release, in conjunction with the announced economic reforms, raised international hopes that Cubans would soon experience a relaxation of other social restrictions, at the time of field research the Cuban government still maintained strict control over all social, political, and economic activity.

Structural Changes

Opinions in Cuba regarding the economic reforms announced by Raul Castro in September 2010 are divided. Some believe the reforms will improve the country's situation, while others think that nothing will change. Responses ranged from a profound belief that the Cuban authorities know what is best and that benefits would be seen almost immediately following the April Communist Party Congress, to outright cynicism that normal Cubans would experience any improvement at all and that only the authorities would benefit from reforms. The majority of respondents expressed fears that the reforms would make basic goods even more expensive while at the same time lowering wages, making life even more difficult and raising concerns that Cuba might be heading toward another Special Period.¹⁹ A teacher in Havana said prices have already begun to rise for services that used to be subsidized but are now offered only by private enterprises—for example, a haircut that used to cost 5 pesos now cost 20 pesos.

Throughout the island, Cubans remain uncertain about what the reforms will mean for them personally and for the country. Many interviewees doubted the promises and claims of improvement made by the government. A taxi driver in Havana worried that government layoffs would actually be double what had been announced, and a female university student in Pinar del Rio pointed out that “we can't all be *cuentapropistas*, and those who do have a business will have to earn a lot to be able to pay for the licenses.” Another woman in Pinar del Rio complained, “They're only offering that I pay more taxes, what kind of reform is that?”

Many Cubans are also anxious about the announced reductions in social assistance, particularly the elimination of the ration booklets and assistance and pensions for the elderly. Several expressed concern that they would not be able to care for their parents without this assistance. As a handicraft vendor in Santa Clara stated, “They're going to throw us out of our jobs, and then on top of that they're cheating the elderly. I have to take care of my in-laws. With what? It can't be like this.” Others, however, believe the reforms will be helpful. A young Communist Party member from Havana declared her full support for the reforms, saying of the government, “If these are their guidelines, then they must be correct.” Others were more measured in their support. A recent medical school graduate in Pinar del Rio said she was unsure how the reforms would affect her family, but that she would sure the Cuban authorities are sufficiently intelligent to understand how reforms work and would implement them correctly.

Although respondents were divided on what reforms they would most like to see implemented, responses generally mirrored desires for economic changes expressed in past Freedom House reports. Elimination of the double currency was raised by interviewees across the island,

¹⁹ With the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba's economy suffered tremendously. Fidel Castro announced that Cuba had entered a “Special Period in a Time of Peace.” *Periodo Especial* refers to these years in the 1990s during which Cubans experienced significant hardships from the sudden lack of Soviet subsidies and supplies.

although not all respondents seemed to understand that the CUC is artificially pegged to the U.S. dollar and the elimination of the *moneda nacional* would not result in immediate wealth for Cubans. Another frequent response was a desire for higher salaries. “I want to earn what a Spanish or American engineer earns,” said a recently laid off engineer from Pinar del Rio. “I know as much as they do.” A 35-year-old architect in Havana described Cuba as an upside-down pyramid where those who study the most earn the least.

As in previous Freedom House studies, agricultural reform was mentioned, particularly in Villa Clara. “The government doesn’t incentivize agriculture,” said one *casa particular* owner. “Before, we were the number one producer of cane sugar, now we’re not even close.” A farmer from the same province also complained about a requirement that he inform the state when a calf is born, and that if he did not take proper care of it, he could be fined or sent to prison. “An animal is worth more than a human here,” he said. Older respondents criticized agriculture as work that the younger generation had left “*botado*” (abandoned, unfinished) in favor of moving to cities, while younger respondents pointed out the poor conditions of the fields, many of which are overrun by *marabú*, a thorny shrub that is difficult to eradicate.

Cubans desire reforms in freedom of expression and travel, but respondents were divided when questioned about political reforms. Some believed a complete political liberalization was necessary, with less government involvement, more individual economic opportunity, and a market economy. Others believed strongly in the current political system and did not want to see any political changes. Many respondents, however, were more measured, believing in socialism but wanting to see some reforms and liberalization.

Some were skeptical that any political change would occur while the current government is in power. “Nothing is ever their fault,” said a 39-year-old poet in Havana, referring to the authorities. “This country can’t take another Special Period, not that the Special Period ever really ended!” A 27-year-old handicraft vendor in Havana agreed, saying the country would have to eventually deal with “the poor habits of those at the top—it will be better when the brothers²⁰ leave.” Several interviewees said they imagined democracy would be good but could not really give an opinion on it since they had never experienced it.

Timeline

Despite the various opinions on the economic reforms, more than half of Cubans interviewed believed that Cuba is “*estancado*” (stuck), neither progressing nor regressing. Approximately a third of respondents believed Cuba is regressing. As one former prostitute in Havana said, “Nothing really changes in Cuba. The country follows the same (expletive) as always—the same as it’s always been and, the way it looks, the same as it will always be.” Most Cubans do not expect change to happen anytime soon, and specifically not within the next year.

As in previous Freedom House studies, many respondents blamed the government and corruption for the lack of progress, hinting that those in power would be the only ones who

²⁰ “The brothers” is a reference to Raul and Fidel Castro. Many Cubans would not mention the Castros or the Cuban authorities directly, referring to them instead peripherally through phrases such as “the brothers,” “you know who I mean,” and “the same ones as always.”

would benefit from changes. Although data from Freedom House's 2009 study suggested that Cubans believed that Raul Castro would be unable to accomplish significant changes while Fidel Castro, his elder brother and predecessor, was still alive, current respondents did not mention Fidel Castro as an impediment to his brother's progress, and some instead alluded to the need for both to leave in order for real change to happen. Others, however, mentioned the U.S. economic embargo, stating that the embargo is to blame for Cuba's poor economic situation and that while the embargo is in place, nothing can change and any reforms will ultimately be unsuccessful.

Cynicism was also evident when researchers asked Cubans to compare their current personal situation with that of 12 months earlier (December 2009/January 2010). Almost all replied that either nothing had changed or their situation had worsened. Nearly half of respondents pointed to their salary, saying it did not cover their basic needs and in some cases that they had trouble surviving. Of the few who indicated that their situation had improved over the past year, half were from Havana, suggesting there is greater access to both the formal and informal economy in Havana. This was not the case uniformly: of those who said their situation worsened, a third were also from Havana.

Cubans living in the provinces have experienced little to no improvement in their personal situation over the last year, and few expected that to change in the coming year. All respondents from Santiago and Holguín said things had stayed the same in the past 12 months, and all but two said their situation would remain the same in the future (one said it would get worse and one declined to answer). A third of respondents from Pinar del Rio stated that their situation had worsened over the past year, but of the few respondents who believed circumstances would improve over the next year, fully half were from Pinar del Rio. For example, a young respondent from Pinar explained that, while his salary was not enough to cover basic expenses, he believed socialism was Cuba's best attribute and that the reforms would be helpful as long as prices did not increase too much as a result. These responses could indicate that Cubans maintain hope for improvement or that the situation in the provinces is already so difficult that respondents had a hard time envisioning how it could worsen any further.

When asked if the country's situation had improved over the past year, the majority of interviewees responded that it was the same or had worsened. Of those who replied that the situation had improved, all but two were from either Havana or Pinar del Rio.

Respondents from Holguín and Camagüey appeared to be the most pessimistic. Similar to the opinions given about their personal situation, all respondents from Holguín said the situation in Cuba had stayed the same over the past year. Holguín respondents also said the country either would not change in the next 12 months or did not want to answer the question. For example, a young mother in Holguín told how neither she nor her spouse had stable incomes, and they were unable to afford suitable housing for themselves and their young child. Instead, they lived in a windowless house next to a foul-smelling stream filled with garbage and mosquitoes. Their economic situation had been bad for some time and they were trying to figure out a way to leave Cuba, given that they believed both their personal and the country's situation would likely stay bad or get worse in the future. All respondents from Camagüey also said the situation in the country would stay the same or get worse.

A large number of respondents found it difficult to speculate on what the future would bring for them personally and for the country. Although some are actively thinking of businesses for which they want licenses or dreaming of leaving Cuba for more economically stable countries, many more are similar to a 30-year-old bicycle repairman in Havana, who believed the reforms thus far have made his life better (he earns more as a repairman than he did in his previous state office job) but was still unable to speculate about what the future might bring. The inability or unwillingness to answer this question is indicative of the lack of control many Cubans feel over their own futures, disillusionment with previous, failed government announcements of reform, and a resulting apathy about envisioning the future.

Youth

Young Cubans are generally proud to be Cuban, but they are not particularly satisfied with life on the island. A graduate student in Havana declared that he was proud of being Cuban, but that did not mean he had to agree with everything he was told “from above.” Another young woman from Holguín said she was not very satisfied with her life; she added that she was proud to be Cuban for what Cuba is, not what the regime has made of it. Keeping with data from previous Freedom House studies, Cuban youth²¹ pointed to the economy as their principal concern and greatest point of unhappiness. Almost all respondents spoke of the high cost of basic goods and low salaries that do not cover daily needs or allow for savings, traveling, or starting a family. The majority of those interviewed believed that the situation in Cuba is either stuck or regressing, and many were unable to envision how the economic reforms would affect them or their families. About half of young Cubans interviewed did not think the reforms would improve the country and believed that things would still be the same in a year, while almost a third said they did not know or did not wish to answer. As in past Freedom House studies, youth, particularly in Havana, remained unwilling or unable to focus on or think about the future. The majority of respondents who were unable to envision the impact of the reforms were from the capital city.

However, a general feeling of expectation regarding the reforms was noticed. These expectations, and a sense of guarded optimism, seemed higher than in previous Freedom House studies, even among those who were unsure of the ultimate results. Several respondents acknowledged that the *cuentas propias* provided an opportunity, but also pointed to the initial capital needed to start a business as a difficult barrier to surmount. One respondent from Pinar del Rio believed that the possibility of becoming a *propietaria* was slim, given the area's rural nature and transportation difficulties.

Young Cubans desire economic stability above everything, followed by freedom of expression. Other reforms they would like to see implemented included the elimination of the dual currency, more private initiatives with less government involvement, and better salaries. A handful of interviewees were angered by high levels of corruption, such as a 27-year-old vendor in Havana who complained about women in the market who, because of their marriages or friendships with high-ranking officials, are able to evade the laws on store ownership and increase their income substantially by owning more than one shop. Another young woman from Pinar del Rio told of the highway tolls she has to pay to take a truck of produce to sell in Havana, essentially bribes

²¹ For the purposes of this study, “youth” are defined as respondents between the ages of 17 and 29.

which can equal half her revenues. Several young Cubans also criticized the transportation system, complaining about everything from street conditions to old buses.

In all provinces, young Cubans' strong desire for change is evident, although they are not always sure what kind of change they want. Even respondents who favored the current regime wanted greater freedom of expression and higher salaries; they also approved of the government's steps to improve the economy. Others, such as a young administrator in Santiago who complained that the concept of socialism has been reduced to party doctrine, favored a socialist government but were frustrated that no other version of socialism could be envisioned other than that held by the Cuban Communist Party. Most simply wanted conditions to improve and several mentioned that nothing would change while the same people are in power. Very few, however, actively equated these sentiments with a change of political system. This is in line with previous Freedom House data indicating that youth are predominantly apolitical even though they resent their economic hardships and government restrictions.

Far more prominent are young people who have simply lost hope that conditions in Cuba will improve and see no future in remaining in Cuba. Many of the issues respondents mentioned, particularly in areas such as travel, the ability to earn a decent wage in their chosen occupation, and education, were mirrored in past Freedom House studies. Several youth in Havana, Villa Clara, and Camagüey told of their plans for leaving Cuba, ranging from saving money, being sponsored by a foreigner, or using their heritage (often European) to obtain foreign citizenship. Others were frustrated by their inability to make decisions to determine their own future. Students in Holguín and Havana, some of whom had dropped out of university, told of not being able to study what they wanted because the government only allows the best students to study certain subjects (law and medicine) or only permits subjects to be taught within the rubric of pedagogy, in order to create teachers rather than professionals. Those fortunate enough to study medicine spoke frequently about wanting to be sent away on mission,²² knowing that they would receive higher salaries abroad and would be able to save for when they returned to Cuba.

Television, radio, newspapers, and word of mouth are the predominant mediums through which young Cubans obtain information. The majority of information is provided by government news sources. Only a few respondents in Havana, Camagüey, and Villa Clara indicated they had access to independent sources of information, and less than a third of respondents used the internet to access information. Interviewees were divided fairly equally on whether they believed information to be reliable. Responses ranged from a 28-year-old information technologist in Havana who read the British Broadcasting Corp. (BBC) online at work and was angered that the BBC Havana correspondent had access to so much more information than Cuban correspondents, to a 23-year-old Communist Youth member, also from Havana, who read nothing more than government-produced news and asserted that whatever international news coverage was included was certainly sufficient.

Young Cubans are much more likely to follow Cuban news than events in other countries, but do not frequently discuss the news that they do follow. When conversations about current events and news do take place, it is almost always with a friend. News is rarely, if ever, discussed with neighbors, bosses, or other authority figures. Fear of retribution is the predominant reason for

²² "On mission" is the term used to refer to Cubans, often medical personnel, who have been sent on goodwill missions to other countries on behalf of Cuba.

the lack of conversation. A young boxer from Pinar del Rio told of his failed attempt to organize a discussion about the reforms with other athletes, and a 27-year-old coco-taxi driver said public places could be dangerous for discussing the news. Although he indicated there was less fear now than in the past, he would only discuss news with close friends and family.

In spite of such limited contact with outside cultures and events, liberal social values and beliefs are common, with most believing that divorce, abortion, and homosexuality are justified at least some of the time. Homosexuality was often seen by young heterosexual respondents as a lifestyle choice, and the main objection mentioned concerned allowing homosexual couples to adopt. Just over half of young Cubans indicated that God was important or very important to them, although few indicated that religious beliefs were an important value to pass on to children. Instead, respondents said the most important values to teach children were independence, tolerance and respect, obedience, and altruism. Independence in particular was valued far more by young respondents, suggesting a potential generational shift in values.

Respect for authority is viewed by many to be either bad or unimportant. When asked if they preferred equality to individualism, the majority of respondents said they wanted a mix of both. As 26-year old-teacher from Havana commented, “What belongs to everyone is no ones, no one takes care of it. In order to take care of things they have to belong to someone.” Young Cubans were divided almost evenly on the issue of whether responsibility for things should lie with the government, the individual, or a combination.

The Catholic Church

In previous Freedom House studies, the Catholic Church was generally viewed as being restricted to social and cultural activities, voicing limited dissent from the government, and playing an essentially non-political role. Restrictions on the exercise of religion appear to have been relaxed in the past year, however, and the Cuban Catholic Church has become more vocal in the political arena. The church played a key role in the July 2010 prisoner release negotiations, and in November 2010 was permitted to open a seminary for the first time in over 50 years. In December of the same year, Raul Castro was photographed wearing a *yarmulke*²³ while participating in a traditional Jewish religious ceremony.

Although respondents were not specifically questioned about their faith, just under half of Cubans interviewed indicated that they self-identified as Catholic. Also prevalent was a mix of atheists, *Santería*²⁴ practitioners, and those who did not belong to a specific religion but held spiritual beliefs. “The Revolution faced off against the church for a long time,” said a musician from Villa Clara. “Since Pope John Paul II’s visit,²⁵ relations have been reestablished and little by little Catholicism is growing stronger again.” The prevalence of Catholicism, as well as the overall diversity of religious beliefs, is consistent with findings from previous Freedom House studies.

²³ Also known as a “*kipa*,” a traditional Jewish headpiece.

²⁴ *Santería* (saint worship) is a mixture of Catholicism and the religion of African Yoruba tribes called *Lucumí*.

²⁵ Pope John Paul II, the last pope to visit Cuba, traveled there in January 1998. The year 2012 marks the 400th anniversary of the discovery of Cuba’s patron saint, and Cuba’s Catholic leadership has expressed hope that Pope Benedict XVI will visit.

The Cubans interviewed did not appear to place much importance on the church's growing strength, or offer any comments on the role of the church as a service provider or supporter of civil society. Some said the church as an institution was unimportant, and none referred to potential assistance from the church when discussing concerns related to the economic reforms. This is a notable change from previous Freedom House interviews conducted shortly after the 2008 hurricanes, when many Cubans were cautiously optimistic about the increased role of the Catholic Church and pointed favorably to humanitarian assistance provided by the church.

The Future

Given that the economy was a predominant daily concern for most Cubans interviewed, it is not surprising that three out of four respondents said economic stability should be the country's main goal over the next 10 years. However, a third of respondents cited freedom of expression as the second goal, demonstrating the continued frustration Cubans feel with this restriction.

The importance of daily economic concerns was evident in that many Cubans interviewed had no opinion about their future. Several said they had stopped thinking about the future and could only live in the present, since they could not earn enough to save, live alone, or even to buy basic goods like soap. Others expressed resignation, as did one 30-year-old information technology manager in Santiago who said, "Everything is in the hands of the government, there's not much to do." A handful of respondents further commented that nothing would change until both of the Castro brothers are gone. A 30-year-old chef in Havana compared Cuba with Spain, saying that, just like after General Francisco Franco's death, when the old leadership dies even better changes will be in store for the island. Some respondents, however, believed that the future was in good hands with the government. An older woman in Santa Clara confidently stated that "Raul is doing well and everything will start to get better in April."

Future travel plans were discussed often, particularly by younger respondents. Many expressed a desire to leave Cuba, while others simply wanted the ability to travel to see new places. For example, a young mother from Villa Clara told of her interest in leaving the country with her four-year-old daughter because she feared the economic situation would worsen. A medical student from Pinar del Rio who is a member of the Communist Party recounted her desire to travel to Spain or Canada to learn about their health care systems, but said she felt a patriotic duty toward her country and would never leave Cuba permanently. Very few of those wishing to travel or leave Cuba, however, had concrete plans for doing so or were even in the process of attempting to save money for the trip.

Cuban parents were worried about their children's future, with several indicating they were doing their best to teach values that they hoped would help their children take advantage of future opportunities. The announcement of economic reforms seems to have created a high level of uncertainty regarding the future for many Cubans, echoing previous levels of anxiety found in Freedom House studies following the 2008 economic reforms. Multiple respondents referred to "Cuban ingenuity" when discussing how they planned to take advantage of future reforms, but respondents were anxious about some of the reforms. Several interviewees were government employees, or had family and friends who worked for the government, and expressed fear about upcoming layoffs. A few indicated they did not know what they would do if they became a *cuentapropista*.

As in past Freedom House reports, respondents did not mention any possible future leaders or key actors in a transition, or express any strong opinions regarding this issue. Although previous Freedom House studies questioned Cubans about the role of the exile community, this particular study did not and none of the respondents mentioned exiles, except to say whether they received remittances from family living outside Cuba. None commented on the role the exile community might play in future changes.

Patterns of Information

Unlike previous Freedom House surveys, researchers sought to study two additional subjects that influence Cubans' perceptions and opinions of their circumstances: how Cubans obtain information and whether they consider that information to be reliable. The study also addressed the corollary topic of technology use, in an attempt to gauge the prevalence of various types of technology in Cuban society.

Sources

The Cuban government continues to maintain nearly complete control over the media, dictating the type of news Cubans can access and the ideological spin given to it through official channels such as the government mouthpiece newspaper *Granma*. Respondents reported that the main sources through which Cubans obtain news are by speaking with others, television, the radio, and newspapers.

The internet remains the least accessible news source for Cubans, suffering from both poor connections and heavy government restrictions on site permissions. The respondents who did claim to obtain news and information from the internet were predominantly from Havana, while only one respondent from Holguín claimed access to information through the internet.²⁶ When asked about access restrictions, a 30-year-old woman from Santiago recounted an opportunity she once had to look at well-known blogger Yoani Sanchez's blog *Generación Y*. Having believed there would be antirevolutionary content on the blog, the woman expressed disappointment upon discovering that it commented on daily shortages and other things that all Cubans experienced and already know about. She did not understand why it was blocked, exclaiming "Why so much fuss about nothing?!"

The ability to access information is also tempered by the lower percentages of Cubans who seek out news. Only about a quarter of respondents claimed to frequently follow internal Cuban news, while over half said they only sometimes followed local news. Half of respondents also said they rarely seek information about events outside of Cuba, underlining the high levels of isolation Cubans experience both on the island and with the outside world. A literary magazine

²⁶ A 29-year-old woman in Holguín pointed out that it is strictly prohibited for Cubans to use *telepunto* services, and there are no internet points for people in general. Although some Cubans have access to the internet at work (where they are often observed by "monitors," researchers also noted that government observation in Holguín at tourist points for internet connection was higher than elsewhere in the country.

editor in Santiago told how he rarely follows the news because all the sources are controlled by the government. He added that a lot of information and news is passed around by hand in order to escape the control of the political police.

Also at issue is Cubans' lack of confidence in the information to which they do have access. Although the great majority of respondents cited the government as their principal news source, less than half said they consider that information to be trustworthy, and over a third said they believed the government was not a trustworthy source. Alternatively, of the few respondents who claimed to obtain their news from an independent source, almost all believed it to be reliable. The responses indicate that independence and credibility go hand-in-hand on the island. As in the youth section referenced previously (page 18), Cubans of all ages talk about news primarily with friends rather than with family members or coworkers. Respondents said that sometimes they agree and sometimes they disagree in their conversations with others, indicating that, when in confidence, Cubans are willing to discuss and debate issues.

Technology

As previously mentioned, access to the internet is low throughout the island, particularly outside of Havana. Almost a third of interviewees had never accessed the internet, and the majority of respondents used the telephone as their principal means of communication with other Cubans on the island, followed closely by in-person contact. Only a third of respondents said they used cell phones, primarily for work activities or to communicate with family, and almost all said the cost of using a cell phone was high.

Only a quarter of interviewees had used e-mail at some point to communicate with others on the island, although the percentage was almost double for e-mailing contacts outside the island. However, these numbers give an inflated impression of e-mail use on the island. Many respondents clarified that they had had only intermittent access to the internet, generally in the past and only through friends or family who connected illegally, and did not currently have e-mail addresses. For example, a *casa particular* manager in Villa Clara apologetically explained to a researcher that he once "had an e-mail account, but I haven't used it in years." Hope was widely expressed that the arrival of fiber optic cable from Venezuela would improve internet accessibility and allow interviewees to have e-mail accounts.²⁷

Respondents more commonly accessed the internet at work, although it is heavily monitored and generally cannot be used for personal communication. One 29-year-old woman from Camagüey said she usually accessed the internet at work, although the connection had been broken for weeks, and followed quickly by saying, "*Ni pensar en la casa!*" (Don't even think about it at home!). Another woman from Villa Clara initially offered to give her e-mail address to a researcher in order to keep in touch. After a brief pause, she recanted the offer, explaining apologetically that her supervisor reviewed her account each time she entered and she would be sanctioned for sending personal e-mails. A small number of respondents, such as a 28-year-old information technologist in Havana, had constant, unobserved access to the internet at work which was used to stay informed on local and international news. However, they too had only professional, not private, e-mail accounts.

²⁷ Fiber optic cable provided by Venezuela reached Cuba in February 2011, after the completion of field work for this study.

Young Cubans were no different than the general population regarding technology use. Less than a third used a cell phone, principally for contacting friends or family, or for work, and of those, half resided in Havana. All young Cubans said the cost of a cell phone was high, and those who used one did so mainly through texting or short rings to identify the caller. They would then use a public pay phone to return the call.

Less than 20 percent of young Cubans used e-mail, and although a majority of respondents said they had used the internet at least once, access to the internet and e-mail was not consistent and was used mostly to correspond with people outside Cuba or to look for information. Both students and young professionals spoke of the highly controlled access to the internet, through blocked sites and a review by supervisors of what had been accessed. Several complained about the inability to legally have the internet at home. A 26-year-old teacher from Havana refused to use his university e-mail account because he was suspicious that the university was reading it, while a young woman in Pinar occasionally used a friend's illegal internet connection to correspond with a friend on mission in Venezuela.

Values and Beliefs

In addition to information and technology, researchers were also asked to study Cubans' values and beliefs, another subject not addressed in previous Freedom House reports. This section will outline the basic findings of the research, and the data will then be used in the following section to provide comparisons with data from the World Values Survey (WVS). The WVS data will ultimately help locate Cuba on an international cultural map.

As mentioned in the previous section on Cuban youth, research indicated that Cubans, in general, are proud to be Cuban. When asked about the importance of God, a third of respondents said God was important. When asked which qualities were most important to teach their children, respondents pointed primarily to responsibility, tolerance and respect, and obedience. To a lesser degree, interviewees mentioned imagination, hard work, and determination and perseverance, and even fewer believed teaching about economic saving and religious faith were important. Many respondents in Santiago appeared to have difficulty answering the question, having to think for a while to decide what qualities they would teach. The researcher was confused until a 44-year-old writer, formerly an elementary teacher, responded that teaching values and qualities to children was the responsibility of the state, through the education system, and not just the parents. This may help explain why responsibility, respect, and obedience ranked so highly, as they are characteristics that would benefit the state, while imagination and determination might pose a greater risk.

Unlike in many other highly religious Latin American societies, divorce was not considered to be taboo, with almost all respondents claiming it was either always or sometimes justifiable, regardless of age or province. Over half of interviewees were also fairly accepting of homosexuality, although to varying degrees. Some respondents shrugged and said it was not their place to judge other people's lifestyles, while others indicated they found homosexuality acceptable as long as it was kept private. As one 40-year-old man from Havana put it, "Them in their place, me in mine." In general, those under 30 years old seemed more tolerant, while the

older generation was slightly less tolerant. The most tolerant provinces regarding homosexuality were Havana, Pinar del Rio, and Holguín, while respondents from Villa Clara were the least tolerant, perhaps indicative of the heavy presence of the Catholic Church there. Abortion was also considered acceptable, at least sometimes, by a large number of respondents, particularly younger ones. Respondents from Pinar del Rio and Santiago were more likely to consider abortion to always be justified, while in all other provinces at least half, if not more, said it was sometimes justified. Several interviewees implied that the harsh economic realities in Cuba made abortion necessary.

Researchers asked interviewees specific questions related to opinions on the authorities, equality, and individualism. Responses varied in each category. A third of respondents indicated that greater respect for the authorities was irrelevant, while the remainder were divided evenly between believing it would be bad or good. A slight generational difference was noticeable in the responses. As mentioned in the previous section on youth (page 19), younger respondents (those under 30 years old) were more likely to say greater respect was bad, while older respondents were more likely to say such respect was good. A young medical student in Santiago, for example, cited cases of corruption so big they finally had been printed in the newspaper, as there was no longer any way to hide it. "What authority can they have?" she asked. Villa Clara had, proportionally, the highest number of respondents who believed greater respect would be good, while Santiago had, proportionally, the highest number of respondents who believed greater respect would be bad (all but four believed so).

Similar responses were given when interviewees were asked if they favored government or individual responsibility, although respondents emphasized government responsibility slightly more. Respondents from Holguín and Santiago tended to emphasize government responsibility, while those from Pinar del Rio valued either individual responsibility or a mix of both. Respondents from Havana and Villa Clara were divided between all three options, but tended to lean toward a combination of both individual and government responsibility. For example, a 29-year-old saleswoman from Camagüey said she would like to have greater liberty to make decisions about her own life, especially since her husband is a doctor on mission in Angola and they rarely see each other. However, she added that it is the government's responsibility to make things better for people. The answer also varied by age. Respondents between 18 and 29 years old and between 46 and 59 years old were divided fairly evenly between the three choices (government, mix, or individual), while those between 30 and 45 years old tended to favor mixed responsibility, and those over 60 tended to favor slightly government responsibility.

Almost half of interviewees believed that some mix between economic equality and individual economic advancement was needed, although those who believed individual economic advancement was more important outnumbered those who prioritized economic equality by a ratio of three to one. Interviewees from Havana and Pinar del Rio more frequently stressed the need for a mixture of both, while respondents from Santiago and Holguín placed more importance on individual economic advancement. Answers again varied by age. Respondents younger than 60 overwhelmingly desired a combination of economic equality and individual advancement, and also leaned more heavily toward individual advancement. Those older than 60 were more measured, in that they also cited a preference for a combination of equality and individual economic advancement but to a much lesser degree, and placed higher importance on equality than other age groups.

Data Comparisons: World Values Survey

For the first time, interview questions were selected to allow for a comparison between data from Cuba and worldwide data collected during both previous World Values Surveys²⁸ and through studies by Latinobarómetro. The following sections outline this comparison through approximate percentages of Cubans who hold the various values and beliefs being studied. As such, the section is necessarily more technical in nature.

Personal Happiness

The results show that 13 percent of respondents said they are “very happy,” 59 percent are “somewhat happy,” 22 percent are “not very happy,” and 6 percent are “not happy at all.” When these results are compared with WVS data collected in 2005 and 2006, Cuban society falls well below the average of people in the world who said they are “very happy.” This response was given by 58 percent of respondents in Mexico, 50 percent in Britain, 49 percent in Colombia, and 45 percent in the United States, just to mention some countries in the upper end. The level of happiness in Cuba is more similar to that expressed in post-communist countries such as Georgia (12 percent), Ukraine (11 percent), Russia (10 percent), and Romania (7 percent). These results may constitute a reflection that communism did not foster a sense of well-being among societies under that type of regime. However, other countries, such as Spain and Italy, also rate relatively low on happiness (18 percent and 14 percent, respectively), suggesting that lack of subjective well-being is not limited to post-communist societies. Moreover, the percentage of respondents in China who said they are very happy was 21 percent in the 2005 study, indicating that communism alone does not necessarily result in low happiness levels.

As a first preliminary conclusion, therefore, Cubans rate comparatively low in subjective well-being, bearing in mind that although this reflects a regularity of societies with a communist experience, it is not the only explanation.

As in many other Latin American societies, many Cubans relate their happiness to their family life. When asked in the survey about what makes them happy (the question, in Spanish, translates as, “In which areas of your life are you happier?”), about 45 percent of Cubans mentioned their family, 28 percent their work or profession, 12 percent their social milieu, and 2 percent their state of health. About 7 percent offered some other response. However, Cubans are comparatively less happy than most Latin Americans: the percentage of respondents who said they are very happy ranges from 58 percent in Mexico, as mentioned earlier, to 28 percent in Peru (Argentina and Uruguay show 32 percent and 30 percent, respectively, and Brazil is at 34 percent). All these figures are at least three times as high as what was observed in Cuba. Still, the percentage of respondents who are very happy in Cuba is twice as large as the proportion observed in Iraq (6 percent).

²⁸ Inglehart, Ronald, et al., *Changing Human Beliefs and Values, 1981-2007: A Cross-Cultural Sourcebook based on the World Values Surveys and European Values Studies*, (México City: Siglo XXI Editores, 2010). The WVS study is conducted in waves occurring over specified periods of time, and countries are not always included in every wave. The most recent wave was conducted from 2005 to 2008. Four previous waves have been conducted, the first in 1981-1984, the second in 1989-1993, the third in 1994-1999, and the fourth in 1999-2004. Data in this report is taken from the most recent wave (or most recent survey for some countries). Fieldwork for the new wave of surveys is scheduled for 2010-2012.

Life Satisfaction

Another indicator of subjective well-being is based on a question about how satisfied Cubans are with life. About 12 percent of respondents said they are very satisfied; 41 percent said somewhat satisfied; 28 percent, not very satisfied; and 18 percent, not satisfied at all. The proportion of highly satisfied people is similar to that of those who said they are very happy.

Comparatively, Cuba also ranks among the lower part of the table of countries in the WVS on life satisfaction. Unlike the question about happiness, which may reflect various types of values, satisfaction with life reflects the level of socioeconomic development in a given country. Countries like Norway, Finland, and the Netherlands, for example, demonstrate very high percentages of satisfied respondents (ranging between 86 percent and 87 percent). Responses for Cuba indicated satisfaction levels of 53 percent, placing the island in the vicinity of China (57 percent), Iran (51 percent), and Russia (49 percent). Egypt ranks lower (43 percent), and Iraq ranks the lowest (19 percent).

Other Latin American countries average higher on life satisfaction than Cuba, with levels that range from 85 percent in Colombia to 64 percent in Peru. The proportion of respondents satisfied with life is 82 percent in Mexico and 79 percent in the United States.

The relatively lower levels of life satisfaction in Cuba, combined with the lower levels of happiness, suggest that the island may be driven by scarcity values.²⁹ This finding appears to be corroborated by the fact that a majority of Cubans interviewed identify economic problems as the main adversity they face in their daily life (59 percent).

Economic Concerns

Comparatively low levels of happiness and life satisfaction in Cuba point to the importance of economic concerns in the island. The following section analyzes some of the responses given in this regard and tries to link materialist priorities to a more general culture of scarcity.

Daily Life Problems

The interviewers asked Cubans to identify the main problems that they face in their daily lives. About 59 percent mentioned some kind of economic problem, principally low wages but also high prices, the double currency, and not being able to buy enough food. Eleven percent referred to job-related problems, such as not being able to find a job in the subject they had studied. Seven percent said family problems—often related to divorce—2 percent mentioned problems related to their safety, and 2 percent reported psychological problems, such as needing to overcome fear or laziness in order to improve their situation.

The weight of economic adversity is clear in these responses and confirms a set of concerns that is related to economic insecurity, scarcity and, very likely, survival values. This helps explain

²⁹ “Scarcity values” can also be referred to as “survival values.” These values focus on physical and physiological security and are usually prioritized by those living in areas where basic resources are lacking or not available. As in Cuba, countries with populations that are driven by scarcity values tend to rank economic needs as the most important, and are less concerned with political or social well-being.

why most of the respondents believe that the main goal for their country in the next 10 years should be to achieve economic stability.

Cuba's Goals for the Next Decade

Asked what their country's main goal for the next 10 years should be, three out of four respondents said economic stability (75 percent). Only 8 percent said freedom of expression, 5 percent mentioned order, and 4 percent greater participation. Asked what the second goal should be, 36 percent said freedom of expression, 17 percent economic stability, 16 percent order, and 10 percent participation. Once again, these responses demonstrate that economic concerns are Cubans' top priority.

These response categories resemble the four-item Materialist-Postmaterialist value index developed in Western Europe in the 1970s. According to that index, respondents who emphasize economic stability and order as their first and second choices (regardless of the ordering) are considered "Materialist," whereas those who emphasize freedom of expression and citizen participation are considered "Postmaterialist." (Combination of one type with another is labeled as "Mixed.") Materialist values are a central ingredient of a scarcity or survival culture, whereas Postmaterialist values are an essential component of the self-expression set of values.

Materialist and Postmaterialist Values

Constructing the Materialist-Postmaterialist (M/PM) value index with the interviews in Cuba provides an excellent comparative indicator that enables us to rank the island on a standard measure of values. Also, by knowing the proportion of Materialist and Postmaterialist respondents, we can also add evidence to the question of where Cuba is likely to be located on the Survival/Self-expression dimension of the WVS cultural map.

According to the M/PM index, 31 percent of Cuban respondents are classified as Materialist, 5 percent as Postmaterialist, and 64 percent as Mixed. In most countries, the largest proportion tends to fall into the Mixed category, so this is a common pattern. However, Cuba is well below the comparative average of Postmaterialist values. In the 2005–06 WVS, China, Egypt, and Russia are among the countries with the lowest proportions of respondents who expressed Postmaterialist values, (between 10 percent and 11 percent). In the Netherlands, Postmaterialism represents 34 percent, and in Germany, 38 percent, showing the highest proportions of that type of values in the latest WVS surveys. The proportion of Postmaterialist in Mexico in 2005 is 29 percent, and in the United States, 21 percent.

This indicator in Cuba adds evidence to support the view that a survival set of values is clearly predominant in the country, and it also shows a remarkable correlation with indicators from China and Russia, suggesting that Cuba may well be located close to those countries in the Survival/Self-expression value dimension.

However, unlike Russia, where tolerance for homosexuality is very limited, Cubans show a more open attitude toward sexual diversity, which means that their location on this values dimension is more pronounced toward the self-expression pole than that of Russia or other post-Soviet societies. According to the results of the interviews, a large majority of respondents in Cuba said

that homosexuality is to some extent justified, whereas only 7 percent said it is never justified. This level of tolerance for sexual diversity is comparable to levels recorded in countries such as Norway (where only 6 percent said homosexuality is never justified) or Sweden (4 percent). In other Latin American countries, the proportion of respondents who believe that homosexuality is never justified is about 34 percent in Mexico, 46 percent in Colombia, 30 percent in Argentina, 31 percent in Brazil, and 18 percent in Uruguay. That proportion in the United States is 33 percent. By comparison, sexual intolerance is much higher in Russia and China, where 65 percent and 78 percent, respectively, said homosexuality is never justified.

This additional evidence from the interviews points out that Cuba's location in the WVS cultural map is close to that of China and Russia, but less inclined toward the survival pole than the latter. The next section will analyze where Cuba is located in the Traditional versus Secular-rational values dimension.

Traditional and Modern Values

The previous discussion demonstrates how Cubans, despite being relatively open to sexual diversity, are driven by a sense of economic insecurity, which brings them closer to a set of values that the WVS literature calls "survival values." The other value dimension considered in the cultural map of the world represents a confrontation of traditional values and secular/rational beliefs. This value dimension gives importance to the role played by individual autonomy (reflected in the most important qualities to encourage among children), religious beliefs, views toward authority, and national pride.

Responses to these questions helped determine the extent to which traditional or rational/secular values are predominant in Cuba. This section examines each of these indicators.

National Pride and Religiosity

Respondents on the island showed a relatively high sense of national pride. About 53 percent said they are very proud to be Cuban, and 36 percent said they are somewhat proud. By comparison, the proportion of respondents who are "very proud" of their nationality is 69 percent in the United States, 60 percent in Spain, and 43 percent in Sweden, all in the vicinity of Cuba. If compared with Latin American nations, however, national pride in Cuba is somewhat lower: 83 percent of Mexicans said they are very proud of their nationality, as did 88 percent of Guatemalans, 76 percent of Uruguayans in 2006, and 77 percent of Peruvians in 2000 (the most recent survey conducted in Peru). This suggests that Cuba is less traditional than other Latin American societies when it comes to national sentiment.

In terms of religion, Cubans are less traditional than other Latin Americans. In Cuba, 34 percent of respondents said God is very important in their personal lives. By contrast, about 92 percent of Brazilians give this high importance to God, as do 86 percent of Mexicans, 90 percent of Venezuelans, and 76 percent of Peruvians. In the United States, the proportion is 68 percent, and, as a reference for our previous comparisons with Russia and China, only 9 percent and 27 percent, respectively, give a high importance to God in those countries. Cuba is less religious than other Latin American countries, but less secular than China and Russia. Based on the two

indicators of national pride and religiosity (importance of God), Cuba appears to be about at the midpoint of the Traditional versus Secular-rational value dimension.

Deference toward Authority and Individual Autonomy

However, distinguishing between the traditional and secular/rational value dimension is also determined by establishing the level of deference toward authority. About 23 percent of Cubans indicated that it would be good to have greater respect for authority in the future. In contrast, 21 percent said it would be bad, and 34 percent said it does not matter.

Traditional societies have higher percentages of deference toward authority (that is, the proportion of respondents who think greater respect for authority would be good). For example, deference for authority tends to be very high in African and Latin American societies: about 79 percent of South Africans said greater respect for authority would be positive, as did 86 percent of Mexicans. In the island of Trinidad, 90 percent gave this response. Sixty-eight percent of Americans also share this opinion. It is evident that deference for authority among Cubans is not very high, which moves them toward the less traditional end of the values dimension.

In terms of individual autonomy, Cubans are also likely at the midpoint on the comparative values dimension, not too oriented by obedience and religious faith, but neither by independence and imagination. When asked what the main values to teach to children should be, 52 percent of Cuban respondents said responsibility; 51 percent, tolerance and respect; 41 percent, obedience; 35 percent, unselfishness; 34 percent, hard work; 34 percent, imagination; 33 percent, determination and perseverance; 31 percent, independence; 31 percent, thrift; and 25 percent, religious faith.

In sum, Cubans are certainly not as traditional in their value orientations as most Latin Americans; however, they are not as secular as people in China, for example, where the role of religious beliefs is minimal. Cubans are driven by a strong sense of economic insecurity, showing comparatively low levels of subjective well-being. These two findings suggest that Cuba may be closer to the cluster of post-communist countries that have participated in the WVS during the last rounds of surveys than to its Latin American neighbors.

Additionally, although a low percentage of Cubans believe deference to authority is positive, similarly low levels of importance are placed on independence, hard work, imagination, and determination. Obedience, tolerance, and respect all received greater emphasis, suggesting that Cubans are not accustomed to acting independently or contradicting authorities. This, in conjunction with high levels of social repression and political indoctrination by the state, may help explain the longevity of the Castro regime and why, even given such low levels of economic security and life satisfaction, the majority of Cubans have seemed unwilling to protest or demand a change in leadership.

Economic Evaluations

As previously mentioned, in the interviews Cubans appear primarily concerned with economic security; economic stability is a driving priority to most. Opinions about economic conditions, both personal and national, reflect this as well. Only 1 in 10 respondents expressed a favorable evaluation about their current personal or household economic situation. In contrast, 33 percent said their current economic situation is bad. Compared with the last 12 months, 11 percent said their situation had improved, 75 percent said it had remained the same, and 14 percent responded that it had deteriorated. Only 13 percent showed optimism about their economic situation for the next 12 months, whereas 18 percent believe their situation will worsen and 49 percent said they expect it to be the same.

Respondents' opinions about the country's economic conditions are even less favorable than opinions about their personal situations. Only 2 percent of Cubans interviewed think that the country's economy is in good shape, while 47 percent think it is in bad shape. Ten percent believe that it improved in the last 12 months, but 25 percent feel that it got worse. Nevertheless, 16 percent expect the economy to get better in the next 12 months, as compared with 13 percent who expect the same regarding their personal economic situation.

A question about income that is usually asked in the Latinobarómetro surveys offers an opportunity to compare Cuba with the rest of Latin America. Respondents are asked whether their income allows them to cover their needs and save some money; only cover their needs; is not enough to cover their needs; or is not enough to cover their needs and also experience great difficulties in day-to-day life.

About 5 percent of Cuban respondents said their income is enough and allows them to save money, and 33 percent said it is enough to cover their needs but not to allow them to save. These two options add up to a 38 percent of respondents who can afford basic expenses and needs. In contrast, 56 percent said their income is not enough (including 33 percent that have great difficulties).

In other Latin American countries surveyed by the 2010 Latinobarómetro study, the proportion of the adult population who say their income is not enough varies from 70 percent in Nicaragua to 35 percent in Brazil, averaging 51 percent in 18 countries. In Mexico, where the international financial crisis hit the hardest, the proportion is 54 percent, very similar to Cuba's.

Conclusions

Freedom House's interviews throughout Cuba indicate that, similar to previous Freedom House reports conducted in past years, Cubans still do not anticipate any positive changes to their situation in the near future. Although the announced economic reforms have raised some expectations, most Cubans do not believe the reforms will positively affect them on a personal level, and many are afraid things will become worse.

Cubans remain preoccupied by economic concerns, and many have trouble meeting basic, daily needs. The findings suggest that Cuba's much-vaunted education system continues to churn out

graduates who are unable to earn a living practicing in their field and must turn to alternative sources of employment that require little to no higher education, such as shopkeepers or tour guides. Medicine alone remains one of the few professions in which a decent living can still be expected after graduation, but even then only if the graduate is selected to go on mission outside of Cuba. Shortages of food and other basic goods continue to be common, and dependence on the black market shows little sign of waning. Cubans are frustrated by the dual currency, which has resulted in the inability of most people to access goods and services that are available only in CUCs, as well as the poor condition of transportation throughout the island. Many young Cubans have postponed starting families, often identified as the primary source of happiness, for purely economic reasons.

However, while Cubans are not particularly satisfied with their situation, they also do not believe they have any control over it. Even those who are angry or disagree with the system are resigned to accepting the government's control over their lives and are simply waiting to see what happens rather than actively planning their future. Although many Cubans indicated a desire for economic and social change, including freedom of expression and freedom of movement, they are fearful of losing traditional government support mechanisms such as ration booklets. Fear of government persecution also remains high and Cubans still do not trust their neighbors or strangers. A strong democracy movement was not perceptible, perhaps unable to emerge while daily economic survival needs continue to preoccupy Cubans. While many Cubans continue to express the opinion that nothing will change until the current regime changes, this is an event generally associated with the death of current leaders rather than any political will or movement to remove them.

The recent economic reforms have raised expectations across the island, although most Cubans remain unconvinced that they will personally experience any benefits. Concerns are widespread that prices will rise and wages will not, making life even more difficult for an already struggling population. Moreover, even as the economic changes continue to be rolled out in Cuba, few believed they will be followed by political reform. Although Cubans were divided on the kind of political reform they would like to see, many supported a "softer" version of socialism that incorporates some level of reform while maintaining the basic system. Some respondents did call for complete political and economic liberalization, yet most were hesitant to endorse a democratic political system they have never experienced and which seems, to them, to be fraught with violence and the loss of the few free public services Cubans still enjoy (health care and education).

The interviews also show that, regardless of the hesitant optimism caused by the reforms, most Cubans do not believe real change will be experienced any time soon, and specifically not within the next year. The combination of severe economic hardships and previous experiences in which the Cuban government has initiated reforms for a short period only to eliminate them later, may help explain why Cubans have great difficulty envisioning their future. Economic conditions force Cubans to focus on daily subsistence rather than planning ahead, while past experience has taught them to view promises of change and reform with a cynical eye. Although Cubans pride themselves on their ingenuity in finding ways to survive in the short term, more than 50 years of government control over virtually every aspect of long-term decision making seems to have resulted in a population that has difficulty planning for and carrying out concrete plans for the future.

Cuban youth remain, in general, apolitical and principally interested in personal economic gain. With the exception of Communist Party affiliates, they do not feel any great attachment to revolutionary ideals and instead are more concerned about personal economic opportunity. They are far more pessimistic than their older counterparts that the reforms will result in real change, and are angered by government corruption and restrictions on freedom of movement and expression. Rather than channeling frustration into calls for change, however, Cuban youth have instead reverted to a mixture of apathy about the future, plans to leave the island as soon as possible, or seeking out economic ventures (authorized or otherwise) that will provide the greatest amount of material gain. Although this could perhaps be attributed in part to growing up witnessing their parents struggling to make ends meet, economic need does not fully account for why Cubans do not engage in calls for reform. Equally at fault may be the restrictive security apparatus employed by the Cuban government to squash dissent. Young Cubans know that their neighbors may be members of a Committee for the Defense of the Revolution³⁰ and could report them for any perceived transgression, that public anti-regime comments can be met with imprisonment and beatings, and that they and their families may be targeted for *actos de repudio*³¹ if they are believed to be unsupportive of the regime. Fear of retribution, combined with the general isolation of Cubans from any external support system, is likely a large contributor to the decision of many young Cubans to simply withdraw from politics and civic engagement, and focus instead on their personal situation.

The Catholic Church continues to be a visible presence on the island, although primarily at a local level. The church's political influence in cases such as the prisoner release negotiations in the summer of 2010 was largely unacknowledged, and few mentioned turning to the church for humanitarian assistance to help cope with economic difficulty. The church is unlikely to serve as a catalyst for change in Cuba, as it is not seen as providing a dissenting voice and it usually is active on the island only with the permission of, and to the extent allowed by, the Cuban government.

The interviews also indicate that more modern technologies, such as the internet and cell phones, remain unattainable for many Cubans, particularly in an uncensored format. Few Cubans have frequent access to e-mail, and those who do often have work accounts that are monitored by authorities. The cost of using cell phones is also prohibitive, and most who own one use it principally as a beeper rather than for calling or text messaging.

Government media sources are not generally considered reliable and independent media is not easily accessible. Many Cubans do not actively follow the news, and exchange information more frequently through word-of-mouth within circles of mutual confidence. As a result, Cubans are isolated both globally, in their inability to obtain information about world events, as well as within the country, as communication and travel between provinces remains legally encumbered and physically difficult.

³⁰ The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution are a network of neighborhood organizations across Cuba that are tasked with promoting social welfare and reporting on counter-revolutionary activity. Committee members monitor the activities of everyone on their block, as well as organizing community activities.

³¹ *Actos de repudio* (acts of repudiation) refers to large groups of Cuban citizens who gather outside the homes of other Cubans considered to be counter-revolutionary and subject them to verbal abuse, intimidation, and physical assault.

An important outcome of the interviews has been the ability, for the first time, to attempt to place the values and beliefs of Cubans within a global and regional context. From a comparative perspective, Cuba is a very interesting, almost unpredictable, case to locate on the two value dimensions pertaining to a traditional versus secular society, and a culture of scarcity versus well-being. It continues to be a traditional society in many ways, and yet is also highly secularized in many others. It is strongly driven by a sense of scarcity but at the same time is very open to sexual diversity. The information obtained through this study confirms that Cuba is indeed a unique case, more socially liberal than most Latin American countries yet more religious than purely Communist countries. When combined with the high emphasis Cubans place on economic survival, it becomes evident that Cuba is more similar to other post-communist countries than to its Latin American neighbors.

Overall, these results show that Cuba has yet to undergo a transformation. The same political figures remain in power; the switch from Fidel to Raul Castro has meant little for ordinary Cubans other than a new face at the podium. Even those who are disgruntled with the current leaders can offer no specific alternative, having had no experience with any other political model. Cubans also have little reason to expect this new round of reforms will have a positive effect, given their experiences with previous reform announcements that resulted in either no change or, as during the Special Period, a change for the worse.

The findings also suggest that Cuba's democracy movement has yet to be successful in its outreach to the larger Cuban public, and must exert greater efforts to provide an alternative economic and political discourse to that disseminated by the Cuban authorities. Although this outreach is understandably hindered by communication and travel difficulties, it is nevertheless important to continue building and strengthening networks of like-minded citizens. Given that dialogue through formal government avenues is often not feasible, Cubans must focus on increasing civic engagement on a local level. Such engagement provides opportunities for Cubans to gain leadership and organizational skills, while instilling a sense of ownership over personal situations. Small-scale civic engagement will also work to combat the apathy many Cubans feel toward planning for the future by providing tangible activities with visible results.

There is, however, room for optimism. Although the Cuban regime appears to make every effort to retain tight political controls as it begins to liberalize the economy, frustration is growing, particularly among the younger generation. After economic concerns, freedom of expression is cited as the second most important goal for Cubans. If the reforms are indeed successful in repairing Cuba's damaged economy and Cubans' daily survival needs are no longer the most pressing concern, Cubans may begin to turn their attention and energy toward demanding greater freedom of expression. A focus on freedom of expression may create an opening to break Cubans from their current apathy and isolation and encourage them to have a say in their country's future.

Appendix 1 – The Provinces



PINAR DEL RÍO PROVINCE

Cuba's western-most province, Pinar del Río is home to the UNESCO World Heritage Site Viñales Valley, one of many valleys and limestone hills formed by the Cordillera de Guaniguanico. These valleys produce Cuba's prized tobacco, although Pinar del Río's natural beauty also make the province a popular hiking and rock climbing destination for tourists. The northern coast of the province borders the Gulf of Mexico and is considered one of Cuba's premier scuba diving locations. Interviews were conducted in the capital city of Pinar del Río, Viñales, Soroa, and Cayo Jutías.

CIUDAD DE LA HABANA

Ciudad de la Habana, or Havana, is the capital of Cuba and home to 2.2 million Cubans. It is the most visited city on the island and serves as the cultural, political, and industrial center of the country. Interviews were conducted in 8 of Havana's 15 *municipios* (city districts). Researchers spoke with *Habaneros* in Habana Vieja, Plaza de la Revolución, Centro Habana, Diez de Octubre, Regla, Miramar, Playa and Habana del Este.

**VILLA CLARA
PROVINCE**

Just 300 miles east of Havana is Villa Clara province, home to many sugar and tobacco plantations. The capital city of Santa Clara is surrounded by low hills, called Las Alturas de Santa Clara. Many students come from all over the island to attend the Universidad Central de Las Villas in Santa Clara. In addition to Santa Clara, researchers found interviewees in the small town of Remedios.

HOLGUÍN PROVINCE

The province of Holguín is located in the north-eastern part of the country. Its capital, also named Holguín, is the fourth largest city in Cuba and is home to the region's largest university. The beaches of Guardalavaca on the north coast of the province are a major tourist attraction. Interviews were conducted in the capital city of Holguín.

**CAMAGÜEY
PROVINCE**

Camagüey is the island's largest province, located in the eastern half of the island and stretching to include both the north and south coasts. Most of the interior of the province consists of a vast plain, making it a natural place for agriculture, the province's main industry. The capital, Camagüey, is Cuba's third largest city and carries the nicknames "City of Squares" and "Corinth of the Caribbean." It is also known as the City of Tinajones due to the continuing presence of large clay containers used to gather rainwater. Interviews were conducted in the capital city of Camagüey, as well as Nuevitas and Santa Lucia in the north

**SANTIAGO DE CUBA
PROVINCE**

Known historically as the Cradle of the Revolution, Santiago de Cuba is a mountainous province located in southeastern Cuba. The namesake capital city is the island's second largest city. The country's highest concentration of Afro-Cubans is found here, making Santiago the vibrant center of Afro-Cuban culture and musical tradition in Cuba. Interviews were conducted in the capital city of Santiago, as well as Playa de Caletón Blanco and Puerto de Boniato.

Appendix 2 – The Questionnaire

Values Questions (taken from the World Values Survey, WVS, or adapted from it):

1. Taking all things together, would you say you are: Very happy, Quite happy, Not very happy, Not at all happy?
2. In what areas of your life are you most happy?
3. What are the biggest problems in your daily life?
4. What qualities should be encouraged to learn at home? Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? (Choose from: independence, hard work, feeling of responsibility, imagination, tolerance and respect for other people, thrift, saving money and things, determination, perseverance, religious faith, unselfishness, obedience.)
5. All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? Please use this card to help with your answer.
(On a 1-10 scale: 1=extremely dissatisfied, 10=completely satisfied)
6. What is the most important objective for your country over the next 10 years? What is the second most important objective for your country over the next 10 years?
(Do not prompt): Maintaining order in the nation, giving people more say in important government decisions, fighting rising prices, protecting freedom of speech
7. Do you think it would be good, bad or inconsequential to have more respect for authority in your country?
8. How important is God in your life?
(On a 1-10 scale: 1-not important, 10-very important)
9. Can divorce be justified? Can abortion be justified? Can homosexuality be justified?
10. How proud are you to be Cuban? (Very proud, quite proud, not very proud, not at all proud)

Information and Technology Questions:

11. Generally, how do you get the news? TV, radio, newspaper, talking to other people, Internet.
12. How often do you follow news about what happens in the country? Every day, several times a week, rarely, never.
13. How often do you follow news about what happens in the outside world? Every day, several times a week, rarely, never.

14. The source of the information that you get about what happens in the country is the government or independent from government?
15. Do you think this news source is reliable?
16. How frequently do you talk about the news with other people? When you talk with others about different topics, do you usually agree in your views or sometimes there are important disagreements? Where do you talk about the news?
17. With whom do you talk most about the news? (Family member, co-worker, neighbor, a prominent member of the community, a close friend, other).
18. Do you use a cell phone? (YES/NO) If yes, what do you use it for principally, secondarily?
19. Is using a cell phone cheap or expensive?
20. How do you communicate with people in Cuba? (Phone, email, person-to-person, etc)
21. How do you communicate with people outside of Cuba? (Phone, email, person-to-person, etc)
22. Have you ever used e-mail or the Internet? How often? Every day, occasionally, one time, never.
23. What is the main use that you give to the Internet? E-mail or Messenger, Search for information, Entertainment, Work, Studies, Other reasons.

Economic Situation and Attitudes toward Reforms:

Questions from Latinobarómetro, LB (or adapted from it)

Personal / Family economic situation

24. How would you rate your current personal and household economic situation?
25. Compared to 12 months ago, would you say that your personal and household economic situation is better off, worse off, or about the same?
26. Compared to 12 months from now, would you say that your personal and household economic situation will be better off, worse off, or about the same?
27. Is your personal and household income put together enough to cover all your needs? In which situation are you? It is about right, it allows us some savings; It is about right, no bog difficulties; It is not enough, we have difficulties; It is not enough, we have big difficulties.

Country Situation:

28. How would you rate the country's current economic situation?
29. Compared to 12 months ago, would you say that the country's economic situation is better off, worse off, or about the same?
30. Compared to 12 months from now, would you say that the country's economic situation will be better off, worse off, or about the same?

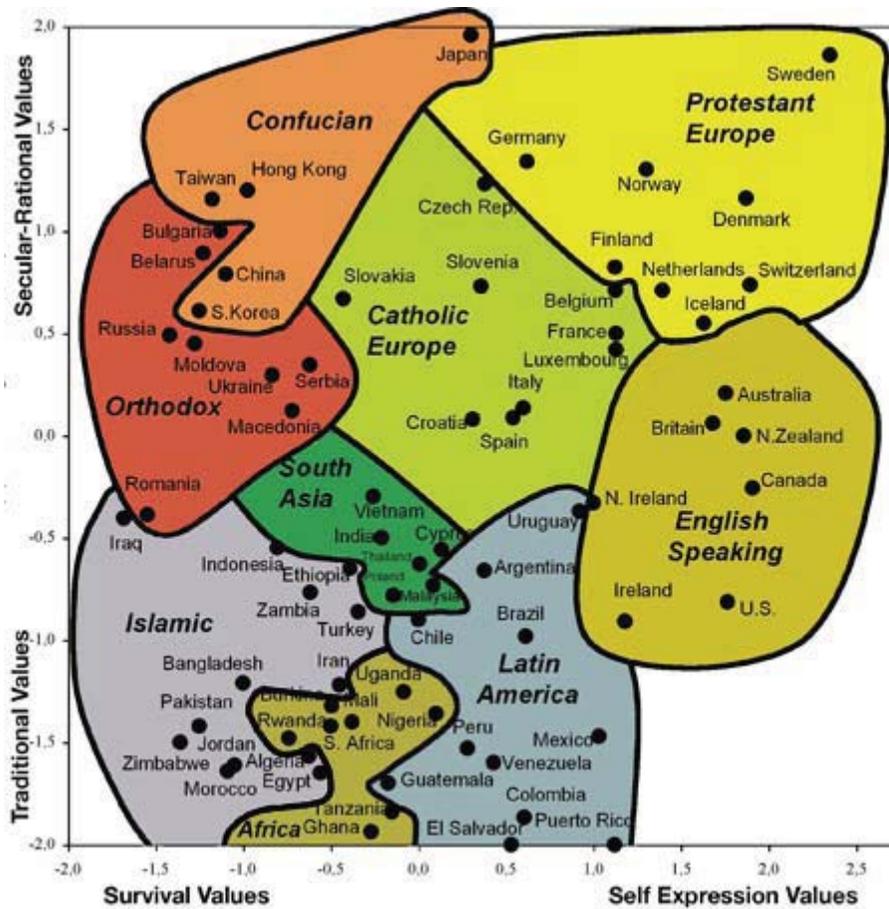
Reforms and Government:

31. Do you think that Cuba is moving forward, moving backwards or not moving?
32. Do you think the government's reforms will make the country better?
33. How do you expect these reforms to affect your family?
34. What reforms would you like to see in Cuba?

Questions from the Comparative National Election Study (CNEP) or adapted:

35. How frequently do you get together with other people to discuss the problems in your community?
36. What is more important to you: ensuring equal distribution of wealth or having incentives for individual initiatives? (Evaluate where the respondent is on scale of 1-10 where 1= equal distribution of wealth and 10=incentives for individual initiative)
37. Who is ultimately responsible for ensuring the economic wellbeing of the citizens: the government or individual people?

Appendix 3 – The World Value Survey Cultural Map 2005-2008



Source: Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, "Changing Mass Priorities: The Link Between Modernization and Democracy." Perspectives on Politics June 2010 (vol 8, No. 2) page 554.