

Cuba

	2013	2014		
Internet Freedom Status	Not Free	Not Free	Population:	11.3 million
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	24	23	Internet Penetration 2013:	26 percent
Limits on Content (0-35)	29	28	Social Media/ICT Apps Blocked:	Yes
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	33	33	Political/Social Content Blocked:	Yes
TOTAL* (0-100)	86	84	Bloggers/ICT Users Arrested:	Yes
			Press Freedom 2014 Status:	Not Free

* 0=most free, 100=least free

Key Developments: May 2013 – May 2014

- In June 2013, access to Cuba's new high-speed internet was extended to citizens for the first time, albeit only from designated, censored "cyber points" at prices few can afford (see **Obstacles to Access**).
- In January 2014, Cuba's telecommunications regulator, ETECSA, announced the possibility of future mobile internet connections as well as home internet access (see **Obstacles to Access**).
- In April 2014, revelations of a secret U.S.-installed Cuban Twitter, known as ZunZuneo, strained the already tense relationship between Cuba and the United States (see **Obstacles to Access**).
- From December 2013 to February 2014, the Cuban government cracked down on opposition surrounding the second annual CELAC summit in Havana, detaining at least 3,000 dissidents and harassing or blocking the mobile phones of others (see **Violations of User Rights**).

Introduction

Cuba has long ranked as one of the world's most repressive environments for information and communication technologies (ICTs). High prices, exceptionally slow connectivity, and extensive government regulation have resulted in a pronounced lack of access to applications and services other than email. Most users can access only a government-controlled intranet rather than the global internet, with hourly connection costs amounting to 20 percent of the minimum monthly wage. Although mobile phone penetration has been on the rise, and access to the high-speed internet provided by the new ALBA-1 fiber-optic cable was finally extended to citizens in late 2013 via the opening of new "cyber points" or "navigation halls," ICT access remains limited. Nevertheless, a vibrant community of bloggers has managed to document conditions on the island and transmit information beyond Cuba's borders.

In recent years, Cuba has exhibited a slight opening to the outside world, although this has not yet correlated to a change in the country's human rights practices. Some 3,000 opposition and civil society members were subject to detention surrounding the Caribbean and Latin American States (CELAC) summit, hosted in Havana in January 2014. The cell phones of known prodemocracy activists were blocked ahead of the meetings, text messages could neither be sent nor received, and those who attempted to call activists were met with busy signals.¹ A number of dissidents were also detained or placed under house arrest as part of "Operation Cleanup," an attempt to keep citizens from voicing human rights concerns to CELAC representatives.²

Although the government appeared to loosen its restrictions on online media by unblocking a number of blogs in 2011, in 2013 a handful of dissident and critical progovernment sites were blocked once again. Phone numbers associated with the "speak-to-tweet" platform, widely used by activists to publicize human rights violations, were shut down in 2012 and remained disabled as of June 2014. Surveillance has continued on the island, where it has been extended to Cuba's new "navigation halls." It is likewise still commonplace in offices, where government-installed software monitors email accounts.³

Obstacles to Access

Internet access in Cuba is complicated by weak infrastructure and tight government control. While recent years have seen an expansion in the number of internet and mobile phone users, the ICT sector remains dominated by government firms. Restrictions on private enterprise were eased under the 2012 update of Cuba's economic model. Although proposed reforms did not initially

1 Yoani Sanchez, "Cuban Regime 'Cleans Up' Opposition for CELAC Summit," Huffington Post, January 29, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/yoani-sanchez/cuban-regime-cleans-up-op_b_4684933.html.

2 Juan O. Tamayo, "Cuban Authorities Harass Dissidents Before Havana Summit," *Miami Herald*, January 27, 2014, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/01/27/3896572/cuban-authorities-harass-dissidents.html>; See also: Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba, "CELAC 2014: Activism, Repression, & an Important Meeting," FHRcuba.org, January 29, 2014, <http://www.fhrcuba.org/2014/02/celac-2014-activism-repression-important-meeting/>; and: Amnesty International, "Cuba Steps Up Repression on the Eve of the CELAC Summit," January 27, 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/cuba-steps-repression-eve-celac-summit-2014-01-27>.

3 Radio Surco, "Prestaciones Efectivas para Redes Informáticas" [Effective Features for Computer Networks], April 11, 2009, <http://www.radiosurco.icrt.cu/Ciencia.php?id=415> (site discontinued); Danny O'Brien, "The Malware Lockdown in Havana and Hanoi," *CPI Blog*, June 8, 2010, <http://cpj.org/blog/2010/06/the-malware-lockdown-in-havana-and-hanoi.php>.

extend to liberalization of the communications sector,⁴ in November 2013, ETECSA, Cuba's state-run telecommunications company, announced that it will allow private workers to market local and long-distance telephone services to the population as self-employed communications agents. The agents may also sell prepaid cards for fixed and mobile telephony and internet access.⁵ In January 2014, ETECSA also announced it will allow balance transfers on cards between prepaid users.⁶

The possibility of self-employment marks a significant shift in Cuba's economic policy, as it affords more control to the citizenry and advances the government's recent trend of loosening restrictions on Cuban nationals. Although the Cuban government began to allow the limited creation of private cooperatives by computer science graduates in 2012, tight internet restrictions, along with prohibitively high computer and software pricing, resulted in a nonexistent official market. While a black market for such commodities does exist, Cuban ICT liberalization was mostly rhetoric prior to the late 2013 announcement allowing private workers to serve as self-employed communications agents.⁷

According to the National Statistics Office, there were 2.6 million internet users in Cuba in 2011, representing 23.2 percent of the population.⁸ The latest data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) places Cuba's internet penetration at 25.71 percent as of 2013—an increase of less than one percent since 2012, when penetration was measured at 25.64 percent.⁹ The vast majority of users cannot access the global internet, but are instead relegated to a tightly controlled government-filtered intranet, which consists of a national email system, a Cuban encyclopedia, a pool of educational materials and open-access journals, Cuban websites, and foreign websites that are supportive of the Cuban government.¹⁰ Experts estimate that approximately 5 percent of Cubans periodically have access to the World Wide Web via government institutions, foreign embassies, and black market sales of minutes by those permitted to have such accounts.¹¹

Although Cuba still has the lowest mobile phone penetration rate in Latin America, the number is rising due in part to changes in government-imposed restrictions on telecommunications. According to a study from the ITU, in 2009, 620,000 Cubans owned mobile phones. By the end of 2013, this figure had ballooned to nearly 2 million, or about 18 percent of the population.¹² As the number

4 Nick Miroff, "Cuba is Reforming, but Wealth and Success are Still Frowned Upon," *Business Insider*, September 4, 2012, <http://www.businessinsider.com/cubas-economic-transition-2012-9>.

5 "Aprobada categoría de 'agente de telecomunicaciones' para el trabajo por cuenta propia" <http://www.etecsa.cu/?page=inicio&sub=agentetelecomunicacion>.

6 For changes implemented by ETECSA, see: Camila Díaz Molina, "Se Extenderán los Plazos de Vigencia de Líneas de Celular en Cubacel," [Effective Period of Cubacel Cell Lines to be Extended] *Cubacelular.org*, December 16, 2012, <http://www.cubacelular.org/2012/12/se-extenderan-los-plazos-de-vigencia-de.html>; and Camila Díaz Molina, "Cubacel Anuncia Nueva Tarifa para el Servicio de Teléfono Móvil en Cuba," *Cubacelular.org*, January 12, 2013, <http://www.cubacelular.org/2013/01/cubacel-anuncia-nueva-tarifa-para-el.html>.

7 Various Authors, "Se Buscan Socios," *Juventud Rebelde* digital edition, December 15, 2012, <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/cuba/2012-12-15/se-buscan-socios/>.

8 National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI), *Tecnología de la Información y la Comunicaciones en Cifras, Cuba 2011* [Information and Communication Technology, Cuba 2011] (Havana: ONEI, June 2012), <http://bit.ly/15BVDBc>.

9 International Telecommunication Union (ITU), *Statistics: Percentage of Individuals Using the Internet, 2000-2013*, ITU, June 23, 2014, http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter.

10 ETECSA: Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A., accessed August 28, 2010, <http://www.etecsa.cu/>.

11 *Emerging Frontiers* (blog), "In Cuba Mystery Shrouds Fate of Internet Cable," May 23, 2012, <http://emergingfrontiersblog.com/2012/05/23/in-cuba-mystery-shrouds-fate-of-internet-cable/>.

12 ITU, "Statistics: Mobile-Cellular Telephone Subscriptions by Country, 2000-2013," http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter

of mobile phone users has grown, ETECSA has begun implementing small changes beneficial to users. Between 2011 and 2012, the government reduced the sign-up fee for mobile service by over 50 percent—although at a cost of US\$60 it still represents three months' wages for an average worker. Receiving phone calls from within Cuba is now free, the cost of text messages sent within the country has been reduced from US\$0.16 to \$0.09, and daytime cellphone rates have been cut from US\$0.60 to \$0.35 per minute.¹³

Despite these positive developments, the cost of mobile service is still too high for the vast majority of Cubans. The government's undeclared policy—viewed as an attempt to attract new funds in hard currency—is predicated on convincing Cuban exiles to pay for these services for their relatives in Cuba. As of January 2014, friends and relatives living abroad were able to use an internet service to pay the phone bills of users living on the island.

Cuba has roaming agreements with 365 carriers in 143 countries.¹⁴ The island's mobile network reportedly covers 75 percent of Cuban territory, with further expansions planned.¹⁵ Most mobile phones do not include internet connections, but it is possible to send and receive international text messages and images with certain phones. Phones that utilize Global Positioning System (GPS) technology or satellite connections, however, are explicitly prohibited by Cuban customs regulations.¹⁶ Additional restrictions are placed on modems, wireless faxes, and satellite dishes, which require special permits from the MIC in order to enter the country.¹⁷

In 2000, the Ministry of Informatics and Communication (MIC) was created to serve as the regulatory authority for the internet. Within the MIC, the Cuban Supervision and Control Agency oversees the development of internet-related technologies.¹⁸ Despite the 2013 connection of a high-speed undersea cable known as ALBA-1, there is still no broadband service on the island, and the limited number of Cubans with internet access face extremely slow connections, making the use of multimedia applications nearly impossible. Despite the high hopes associated with ALBA-1, Cuba's penetration rate has barely grown since 2012.¹⁹ It is worth noting that the most significant jump in internet access appears to have occurred between 2011 and 2012—prior to the connection of the high-speed cable—when reported internet penetration rates jumped from 16 percent to nearly 26 percent.²⁰ According to statistical findings from Google Analytics, Cuba has the slowest connection speed in the Western Hemisphere and is among the worst in the world.²¹ Access over the intranet is

13 Americas View (blog), "Telecoms in Cuba: Talk is cheap," *The Economist* online, January 24, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/americasview/2012/01/telecoms-cuba>.

14 Camila Díaz Molina, "Roaming Internacional para Usuarios de Cubacel," [International Roaming for Users of Cubacel] Cubacelular.org, November 10, 2012, <http://www.cubacelular.org/2012/11/roaming-internacional-para-usuarios-de.html>.

15 Nick Miroff, "Getting Cell Phones into Cuban Hands," *Global Post*, May 17, 2010, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/cuba/100514/cell-phone>

16 See: Cuban Customs Website (Aduana General de la Republica de Cuba): <http://bit.ly/1hbJFOI>.

17 See: Cuban Customs Website (Aduana General de la Republica de Cuba).

18 For the website of The Ministry of Informatics and Communications see: <http://www.mic.gov.cu/>.

19 Amaury E. del Valle, "Cuba, La Red Sigue Creciendo" [Cuba, the Network Continues to Grow], *Juventud Rebelde* online, January 6, 2010, <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/suplementos/informatica/2010-01-06/cuba-la-red-sigue-creciendo/>; See also: Larry Press, "Past, Present, and Future of the Internet in Cuba," in *Papers and Proceedings of the Twenty-first Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE)* (Miami: ASCE, August 2011), <http://bit.ly/w4nQPU>.

20 International Telecommunication Union (ITU), *Statistics: Percentage of Individuals Using the Internet, 2000-2013*, ITU, June 23, 2014, http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter.

21 Google Analytics (blog), Blogspot, last modified April 19, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1Bvq5p>.

similarly slow due to weak domestic infrastructure and the limited extension of access to Cuba's new high-speed cable.

The Cuban government continues to blame the U.S. embargo for the country's connectivity problems, saying it must use a slow, costly satellite connection system and may only buy limited space. President Barack Obama eased some aspects of Washington's prolonged trade sanctions in 2009, however, allowing U.S. telecommunications firms to enter into roaming agreements with Cuban providers and to establish fiber-optic cable and satellite telecommunication facilities linking the United States and Cuba.²² Official media ignored this important change in the U.S. legal framework, and Cuban leaders reiterated their demand for a complete end to the embargo.

The bilateral relationship was also affected by a 2009 incident that directly touched on the lack of open internet access in Cuba. On December 4, 2009, Cuban authorities arrested Alan Gross, an American independent contractor who was in the country to set up individual satellite-based internet connections as part of a U.S. government-funded project. In March 2011, Gross was sentenced to 15 years in prison for committing an act "against the independence or territorial integrity of the state."²³ Despite a handful of serious health concerns and a self-imposed hunger strike in April 2014, Gross continues to serve the remainder of his sentence in a Cuban prison.²⁴

The volatile relationship between Cuba and the United States took another hit in April 2014, when information was leaked regarding a USAID program to improve connectivity and communications in Cuba. Reports surfaced that the U.S. development agency had created a "Cuban Twitter," known as ZunZuneo, which attracted some 40,000 subscribers before it was shut down in 2012. News of the program, which the U.S. government has called "secret" but not "covert," and which was ultimately ineffective given Cuba's many obstacles to access, has strained Cuban-U.S. relations further, and has given the Cuban government ammunition in its quest to label independent bloggers on the island as "U.S.-funded mercenaries."²⁵

In February 2011, Cuban officials celebrated the installation of a 1,600 km undersea fiber-optic cable laid between Cuba and Venezuela at a cost of approximately US\$72 million.²⁶ The eagerly anticipated cable, known as ALBA-1, was expected to increase data-transmission speeds 3,000 fold, yet no news from the authorities was provided for nearly two years.²⁷ Due to the prolonged silence, rumors

22 "Fact Sheet: Reaching Out to the Cuban People," The White House: Office of the Press Secretary, April 13, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Fact-Sheet-Reaching-out-to-the-Cuban-people.

23 Ellery Roberts Biddle, "Cuba: US Contractor Sentenced to 15 Years in Prison," Global Voices, April 4, 2011, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/04/04/cuba-us-contractor-sentenced-to-15-years-in-prison/>.

24 Karen DeYoung, "Alan Gross, U.S. Contractor Held in Cuba, Goes on Hunger Strike," *The Washington Post*, April 8, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/alan-gross-us-contractor-held-in-cuba-goes-on-hunger-strike/2014/04/07/9a5676e4-be92-11e3-bcec-b71ee10e9bc3_story.html

25 Emily Parker, "The Great Debate: Cuba's Uneasy Internet Connection," Reuters, April 8, 2014, <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2014/04/08/cubas-uneasy-internet-connection/>

26 Ministerio de Educación Superior, "Cable de Fibra Optica Une Venezuela, Cuba y Jamaica" [Fiber Optic Cable Unites Venezuela, Cuba, and Jamaica], accessed August 13, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1bhCqDV>; *El Pais*, "Llega a Cuba el Cable Submarine de Fibra Optica para Ofrecer Internet de Banda Ancha" [Underwater Fiber Optic Cable Arrives in Cuba to Offer Broad Band Internet], February 10, 2011, http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2011/02/10/actualidad/1297292404_850215.html.

27 Curt Hopkins, "Cuba's Internet Capacity to Increase 3,000x," *ReadWriteWeb* (blog), February 13, 2011, http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/cubas_internet_capacity_increased_by_3000_percent.php; International Telecommunication Union (ITU) News Release, "ITU Hails Connectivity Boost for Cuba," February 11, 2011, http://www.itu.int/net/pressoffice/press_releases/2011/CM03.aspx; See also: *Emerging Frontiers* (blog), "In Cuba Mystery Shrouds Fate of Internet Cable," May 23, 2012, <http://emergingfrontiersblog.com/2012/05/23/in-cuba-mystery-shrouds-fate-of-internet-cable/>.

began to spread that Cuban authorities were reluctant to extend access to the general population for fear of enabling a “Cuban Spring.”²⁸ In late January 2013, ETECSA announced that the cable had been connected, but noted that opening of the line would be gradual (predictably limited to select government offices at first) and that infrastructure would still be enhanced in order to facilitate widespread use of the new technology.²⁹ In June 2013, citizens were able to access the internet through connections to the new fiber-optic cable in government-run “navigation halls” (see below).

Prohibitively high costs also place internet access beyond the reach of most of the population. A simple computer with a monitor averages around US\$722 in retail outlets, and at least US\$550 on the black market.³⁰ By comparison, the average monthly Cuban salary is approximately US\$20.³¹ Even an internet connection in a hotel costs between US\$6-\$12 per hour.³² Only 31 percent of Cubans report having access to a computer, the distribution of which is run by the state-owned Copextel Corporation. Of those with access, 85 percent noted that the computers were located at work or school.³³

In June 2013, Cuban authorities opened 121 government-run internet access points, or “navigation halls,” with 444 computers, marking a small step toward greater connectivity in a country with one of the lowest percentages of internet penetration in the Western hemisphere. According to Cuba’s official newspaper, *Gaceta Oficial*, members of the public are now able to access national websites for US\$0.60 per hour and international sites for US\$4.50 per hour—a significant reduction from the previous rate of \$6 per hour, but still prohibitive compared to an average monthly salary of US\$20. The cost for checking email will remain unchanged at US\$1.50 per hour. Users have been pleasantly surprised by the relatively high connection speed (for Cuba)—up to 2 Mbps—as well as access to some web pages once blocked by the government. However, sites such as Radio/TV Marti, the U.S. government broadcaster that transmits to the island, remain blocked.

By paying for government-run internet service directly at cybercafes or purchasing a “Nauta” card (a pass that links to ETECSA’s interface of the same name and can only be used at specific locations), users will be able to access temporary accounts, valid for 30 calendar days as of the date of the first session. They will also be able to open permanent accounts upon request, complete with username, password, and email address, if they can afford the cost of the service—and the high level of surveillance associated with such accounts.

Despite the improvements in options for access and the reduction of fees, web use at “cyber points” and “navigation halls” remains tightly controlled. A recent decree from the Ministry of Communications reaffirmed the government’s continued monitoring of internet traffic, stating that ETECSA will “immediately” end a user’s access if he or she commits “any violation of the norms of ethical behavior promoted by the Cuban state.” Users must show their national ID cards and sign

28 Nick Miroff, “In Cuba, Dial-Up Internet is a Luxury,” National Public Radio, December 14, 2011, <http://n.pr/vFmLh1>.

29 BBC online, “Cuba First High-Speed Internet Connection Activated,” January 24, 2012, <http://bbc.in/V0ggOM>.

30 Will Weissert, “Cubans Queue for Computers as PC Ban Lifted, But Web Still Outlawed,” *Irish Examiner* online, May 5, 2008, <http://bit.ly/197EZdn>.

31 Agence France-Presse, “Mobile Phone Use Booms in Cuba Following Easing of Restrictions,” April 24, 2008.

32 Tracey Eaton, “Cuban Dissident Blogger Yoani Sanchez Tours the United States,” Florida Center for Investigative Reporting, March 20, 2013, <http://fcir.org/2013/03/20/cuban-dissident-blogger-yoani-sanchez-tours-the-united-states/>.

33 National Statistics Office (ONE), Republic of Cuba, *Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones en Cifras: Cuba 2009* [Information and Communication Technologies in Figures: Cuba 2009] (Havana: ONE, May 2010), <http://bit.ly/19esVBI>.

an agreement stating that they will not use the service for anything “that could be considered ... damaging or harmful to public security”—a vague term that could presumably extend to political dissidence.

If users attempt to send email with attachments, ETECSA’s own NAUTA interface system greets them with a pop-up window reminding them that “other people may see what you are sending” and asking if they wish to continue. Although the pop-up window is marked “Internet Explorer” and appears to be a real message generated by the search engine, several Cuban cybernauts have said that they had never seen such a message when using internet cafes in Havana’s tourist hotels. Such claims suggest that ETECSA may have programmed computers at its new access points to prompt users as a reminder that the government is monitoring their online activities.

There are only two ISPs in Cuba: CENIAI Internet and ENET (ETECSA). Both are owned by the state, though Telecom Italia previously held shares of ETECSA. In February 2011, the state-owned company Rafin S.A., a financial firm known for its connections to the military, bought Telecom Italia’s 27 percent stake for US\$706 million.³⁴ As a result, the telecom company is now completely owned by six Cuban state entities. Cubacel, a subsidiary of ETECSA, is the only mobile phone carrier in Cuba.

The Cuban government continues to control the legal and institutional structures that determine who has access to the internet and how much access will be permitted.³⁵ This regulation extends to the sale and distribution of internet-related equipment. In early 2008, after a nearly decade-long ban, the government began allowing Cubans to buy personal computers. Cuban officials, doctors, or trusted journalists and intellectuals can now legally connect to an ISP with a government permit. Approved access to the internet, which is typically restricted to email and sites related to one’s occupation, is granted to doctors, professors, and government officials, whose offices are linked by an online network called Infomed. Home connections are not yet allowed for the vast majority of Cubans.

The government claims that all schools have computer labs, but in practice, internet access is usually prohibited for students or limited to very short periods of access, certain email accounts, or supervised activities on the national intranet. Students at the Latin American School of Medicine in Havana, for example, are reportedly granted only 40 minutes per week of internet access, rendering online research or accessing academic journals infeasible.³⁶ Students of journalism at Havana University are granted up to 40 MB of data access per month as part of the “Hypermedia Journalism” course.³⁷

Despite the many barriers, Cubans still find ways of connecting to the internet through both authorized and unauthorized points of access. Some are able to break through infrastructural blockages by building their own antennas, using illegal dial-up connections, or developing blogs on foreign platforms. The underground economy of internet access also includes account sharing, in

34 Jerrold Colten, “Telecom Italia Sells Etecsa Stake to Rafin SA For \$706 Million,” Bloomberg, January 31, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-01-31/telecom-italia-sells-etezca-stake-to-rafin-sa-for-706-million.html>.

35 Ben Corbett, *This Is Cuba: An Outlaw Culture Survives* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2002), 145.

36 Graham Sowa, “Why Students in Cuba Need Internet,” *Havana Times*, May 23, 2011, <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=44073>.

37 Elaine Díaz, La Polémica digital, “¿A dónde van los desconectados?” <http://espaciodeelaine.wordpress.com/2013/09/18/a-donde-van-los-desconectados/>.

which authorized users sell access to those without an official account for one or two convertible pesos (CUC) per hour. Some foreign embassies allow Cubans to use their facilities, but a number of people who have visited embassies for this purpose have reported police harassment. There is also a thriving improvisational system of “sneakernets,” in which USB flash drives and data discs are used to distribute materials (articles, prohibited photos, satirical cartoons, video clips) that have been downloaded from the internet or stolen from government offices.

At times of heightened political sensitivity, the government has used its complete control of the cell phone network to selectively obstruct citizens’ communications. During a March 2012 visit to the island by Pope Benedict XVI and the January 2014 Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC summit) in Havana, bloggers and dissidents reported that their cell phones were not working.³⁸ One independent journalist who investigated the situation found that calls were being automatically redirected to a phone number belonging to the Ministry of Interior.³⁹ All calls from dissidents’ cell phones are monitored and the service is cut regularly to those working as freelance journalists or voicing views the government does not condone via citizen journalism. Such was the case in early summer 2014 for three independent reporters working for the news site *Hablemos Press*. Having identified the media outlet as a threat, ETECSA reportedly disconnected the cellphones of at least three of its writers, each of whom was also detained for between 24 and 96 hours.⁴⁰

The Cuban government zealously pursues those who violate telecommunications access laws, and government technicians routinely “sniff” neighborhoods with their handheld devices in search of ham radios and satellite dishes. In December 2012, the official newspaper *Granma* explicitly warned against “counterrevolutionary” and subversive use of illegal nets.⁴¹ In an extensive report entitled “Violations of the Cuban Telecommunications System,” *Granma* detailed the criminal investigation of two highly profitable cyber-networks illegally using ETECSA’s fixed and mobile market channels. The investigation is still in progress, but the information provided by the MIC and the attorney general alleges that the illegal networks began operating in 2009 and were responsible for a loss of revenue for ETECSA totaling US\$3 million. The defendants, who are being prosecuted for illegal economic activity and fraud, face fines coupled with sentences of three to ten years in prison.

In January 2014, the Cuban government announced a handful of changes in international policy and even hinted at the potential easing of telecommunications restrictions. A new port was constructed with a US\$957 million investment from Brazil to facilitate international trade;⁴² discussions over ending the U.S. embargo on Cuba also heated up in early 2014; and Havana played host to the CELAC summit, which convened the leaders of Latin American and Caribbean states in order to encourage dialogue and establish shared goals for the region.

Although details about changes to telecommunications policy were vague and did not include

38 *Hispanically Speaking News*, “Silenced During Papal Visit, Cuban Bloggers, Dissidents Speak Out (VIDEO),” April 7, 2012, <http://bit.ly/15Cqt7h>.

39 Juan O. Tamayo, “Cuba Diverts Dissidents’ Phone Numbers in Pope Crackdown,” *The Miami Herald* online, March 30, 2012, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/03/30/2723658/cubas-interior-ministry-left-fingerprint.html>.

40 Juan O. Tamayo, “Top Dissidents Detained in Cuba,” *Miami Herald*, June 11, 2014, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/06/11/4171942/top-dissidents-detained-in-cuba.html>

41 Sheyla Delgado Guerra, “El ‘Enredado’ y Costoso Saldo de la Ilegalidad,” [The “Tangled” and Expensive Balance of Illegality] *Granma* online, December 7, 2012, <http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/2012/12/07/nacional/artic07.html>.

42 Nelson Acosta and Marc Frank, “Cuba Opens New Port Built with Brazilian Aid,” Reuters, January 27, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/27/cuba-brazil-port-idUSL2N0L10XO20140127>

information regarding pricing or technology, representatives announced two exciting possibilities for Cubans over the upcoming year—mobile internet connections and home internet access. Experts speculate that access will extend only to the government run intranet and “Nauta” email accounts. Since December 2013, ETECSA has also been working on “opening” Cuban cellphones—which will likely need to support data services (GPRS) if they are to be used for internet activities. If enacted, such a policy shift could have a significant impact on Cuban citizens’ mobile and internet connectivity.

Limits on Content

Rather than relying on the technically sophisticated filtering and blocking used by other repressive regimes, the Cuban government limits users’ access to information primarily via lack of technology and prohibitive costs. With the exception of unauthorized points of access in old Havana, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is blocked in Cuba, except from some Wi-Fi hotel connections. Restrictions on email in the workplace have been growing in recent years, and dissident websites and blogs continue to be subject to periodic disabling or blocking. The cost of access to technologies that facilitate information sharing continues to be high; nonetheless, there is a vibrant community of bloggers in Cuba who utilize the medium to report on conditions within the country.

The websites of foreign news outlets—including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *Le Monde*, and *El Nuevo Herald* (a Miami-based Spanish-language daily)—are readily available in Cuba.⁴³ The sites of some human rights groups, such as Human Rights Watch and Freedom House, remain largely accessible; however, Amnesty International’s website was recently blocked.⁴⁴ For the most part, dissident news websites such as *Payolibre*, and independent journalism sites hosted on overseas servers, such as *Cubanet*, are restricted. The Association for Freedom of the Press (SIAPA) is also blocked, as are the websites of dissident organizations with a presence on the island (such as Damas de Blanco, MCL and UNPACU), which remain inaccessible from government-sponsored youth computer centers, navigation halls, and the like.⁴⁵ Revolico, a platform for posting classified advertisements, continues to be blocked, despite the apolitical nature of its content.⁴⁶ In August 2013, the government also blocked access to Google, explaining that Cuba is working on the development of a “national browser” along with software to centralize contents. News regarding the national browser has been limited; however, and it remains to be seen whether the application has been completed and is ready for use.

Social-networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were recently blocked at some universities and government institutions, but may be accessed—with consistent monitoring but varying reliability—from some cybercafes and hotels. The government has also increased its control

43 Reporters Without Borders News Release, “Free Expression Must Go with Better Communications, Says Reporters Without Borders as Blogs Prove Hard to Access,” March 31, 2008, <http://bit.ly/16K5E9s>.

44 As reported by a source in Havana who wishes to remain anonymous.

45 For *Bitácora Cubana* see: <http://cubabit.blogspot.com/>; For the website of Asociación pro Libertad de Prensa (the Association for Freedom of the Press) see: <http://prolibertadprensa.blogspot.com/>.

46 Marc Lacey, “A Black Market Finds a Home in the Web’s Back Alleys,” *New York Times* online, January 3, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/04/world/americas/04havana.html>; Peter Orsi, “Cuba’s Next Step on Capitalist Road: Advertising,” Boston.com, June 16, 2012, <http://bo.st/KR3Kch>.

over the use of email in official institutions, installing a platform that restricts spam and specifically prevents the transmission of “chain letters critical of the government.”⁴⁷

While ETECSA does not proactively police networks and delete content, there have been reports of bloggers removing posts after being threatened by officials for publishing views criticizing government actions.⁴⁸ The wording of certain government provisions regarding content regulation is vague and allows for a wide array of posts to be censored without oversight. Resolution 179 (2008), for example, authorizes ETECSA to “take the necessary steps to prevent access to sites whose contents are contrary to social interests, ethics and morals, as well as the use of applications that affect the integrity or security of the state.”⁴⁹

Beginning in 2007, the government systematically blocked core internet portal sites such as Yahoo, MSN, and Hotmail. As of 2014, these sites remain blocked in some government institutions, although they are largely accessible from hotels. Cuban authorities also restricted access to Cuban and foreign websites that contained independent reporting or views critical of the government. Among the continuously blocked sites are the *Bitácora Cubana* blog and the Voces Cubana platform, which hosts approximately 40 blogs including Yoani Sánchez’s award winning *Generación Y*. While most of these sites and international portals were unblocked without explanation in February 2011, many were re-blocked in 2012 and 2013. The University of Matanzas’ student-run blog *La Joven Cuba*, which faced difficulties in 2012, became accessible again in mid-2013.⁵⁰ Content on Elaine Diaz’s blog *La Polemica Digital*, which suffered similar challenges, remains available, however blog activity is sporadic.⁵¹ In both cases, the associated bloggers were subject to intimidation, resulting in self-censorship.

Following in the footsteps of other repressive regimes contending with a highly literate and digitally interested populous, the government has also launched its own copycat versions of popular websites, such as Wikipedia, Twitter, and Facebook, and by some accounts, is delaying full connectivity of the ALBA-1 cable until the sites are fully operational so that content can be closely controlled.⁵² Although the Cuban government’s faux Facebook site, Red Social, was active for only

47 Café Fuerte, “Cuba Anuncia Cambio de Plataforma Estatal para Correos Electronicos,” [Cuba Announces Statewide Change to Email Platform] Cafefuerte.com, August 31 2012, <http://bit.ly/RqHp8C>.

48 For examples, see: Café Fuerte, “Malestar por Cambio de Edificio del Partido Comunista en Camagüey,” [Upset over Change to Communist Party Building in Camagüey] Cafefuerte.com, July 27, 2012, <http://cafefuerte.com/cuba/noticias-de-cuba/sociedad/2050-malestar-por-cambio-de-edificio-del-partido-comunista-en-camagueey>; and *El Yuma* (blog), “LJC, The Orwellian ‘Memory Hole,’ & Google Cache,” Blogspot, July 8, 2012, <http://bit.ly/RPbiC0>.

49 Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa, Inc., (Inter American Press Association), “Cuba,” in *Reports and Resolutions*, accessed January 28, 2013, http://www.sipiapa.com/v4/det_informe.php?idioma=us&asamblea=228&inford=346.

50 *El Yuma* (blog), “La Blogosfera Cubana: 2012 Year in Review,” [The Cuban Blogosphere: 2012 Year in Review] Blogspot, December 19, 2012, <http://elyuma.blogspot.com.es/2012/12/la-blogosfera-cubana-2012-year-in-review.html>; and Elaine Diaz, *La Polemica Digital* (blog), [The Digital Controversy] Wordpress.com, <http://espaciodeelaine.wordpress.com/>

51 The site’s most recent activity was a “last post” published in August 2012 accompanied by one more exceptional post in December 2012.

52 In May 2012, Venezuela’s minister of science and technology told media that the cable was operational, but that it was up to the Cuban government to employ it. Some experts reported that internet speeds had improved in the Ministry of Interior or other government offices, adding to speculation that the government is using the cable in part to provide Venezuelan officials with access to Cuban government databases, while deliberately postponing access to the cable for average users. See: “Venezuela: Fiber-optic Cable to Cuba is Working,” *Businessweek*, May 24, 2012, <http://www.businessweek.com/ap/2012-05-24/venezuela-fiber-optic-cable-to-cuba-is-working>; Larry Press, “Hard Data on the Idle ALBA-1 Undersea Cable,” *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), May 22, 2012, <http://laredcubana.blogspot.com.es/2012/05/hard-data-on-idle-alba-1-undersea-cable.html>.

a brief period in 2011,⁵³ its 2010 copycat version of Wikipedia, known as EcuRed, was still active as of June 2014, and had even inspired an app.⁵⁴ The government's portable version of EcuRed, known as EcuMovil, became available for free installation on cell phones at JovenClubs (youth centers) beginning in April 2014.⁵⁵

Havana seems to be taking its cues in the field of copycat sites from Beijing, which has successfully prevented access to the most popular global social media sites by directing citizens to closely monitored, censored versions of these platforms. In September 2013, the Cuban government announced the launch of a new "Cuban social network" called La Tendedera, which will be accessible only from JovenClubs and will allow the sharing of texts, photos, and videos, while also offering online chatrooms accessible from public or private rooms. According to the official Union of Journalists of Cuba (UPEC), the birth of the new social network comes "after many failed attempts."

Another new social media development from the regime comes in the form of a Cuban blogging platform called Reflejos. Built on WordPress, one of the companies that manage some of the most popular online content, Reflejos can be viewed from outside youth centers; however, blogging outside the headquarters of JovenClubs is not permitted. Nonetheless, Cuban journalists and bloggers are optimistic about the potential of Reflejos, given that it presents the opportunity for those whose sites are hosted on foreign platforms to have a voice in Cuba.⁵⁶ ETECSA has also announced that intranet users will soon be able to use the microblogging platform El Pitazo, as well as a URL shortening site and hypermedia sites, which may host and manage multimedia content.

In Cuba, the obstacles to sharing information are significant—the majority of citizen journalism is done offline, often by hand or typewriter, and uploaded and published once or twice a week. The financial cost of freedom of expression is also great; the tools that facilitate contribution to media outlets, such as paid internet access cards and international phone calls, are prohibitively expensive and present a major obstacle.

While there is no exact count of blogs produced in Cuba, *Blogs Cubanos* reports that there are now more than 1,600 blogs, including sites such as *Retazos* and *Convivencia*.⁵⁷ Independent websites hosted outside the country, such as *La Polemica Digital*, *Havana Times*, and *Estado de Sats*, provide the few who are able to access the net with a much richer and more robust selection of news sources and perspectives than those available from state-run media. Regional radio stations, magazines, and official newspapers are also creating online versions, though these are state-run and do not accept contributions from independent journalists. Some of these official sites recently installed commentary tools that foster discussion and allow readers to provide feedback, albeit censored. Other news sites run by Cuban exiles, such as *Diario de Cuba*, *Penúltimos Días*, and *Café*

53 *The Philandrist* (blog), "The Cuban Facebook Imitation Saga – Red Social (Social Network)," December 6, 2011, <http://thephilandrist.wordpress.com/2011/12/06/the-cuban-facebook-imitation-saga-redsocial/>.

54 Larry Press, "EcuRed is Not Open like Wikipedia," *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), December 21, 2011, <http://laredcubana.blogspot.com/2011/12/ecured-is-not-open-like-wikipedia.html>.

55 Cuba Debate online, "EcuRed Estara Disponible para Moviles" [EcuRed to be Available for Mobile] March 27, 2013, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2013/03/27/enciclopedia-ecured-estara-disponible-para-moviles/>

56 *Blogs Cubanos* (blog), "Una Plataforma de Blogs Cubanos: Reflejos," WordPress.com, May 19, 2013, <http://blogscubanos.wordpress.com/2013/05/19/una-plataforma-de-blogs-cubanos-reflejos/>

57 "Blogs Cubanos – Top Alexia Cuba," *Blogs Cubanos* (blog), January 19, 2013, <http://blogscubanos.wordpress.com/2013/01/19/blogs-cubanos/>.

Fuerte are now censored at some points but available at others. As censored areas change without warning it is difficult to know where and when such blogs will be accessible on the island.

Unable to completely suppress dissident activity on the internet through legal and infrastructural constraints, the authorities have taken a number of countermeasures, including dominating conversations within the medium itself. The Cuban government maintains a major presence on social networks via “Operación Verdad,” (Operation Truth), its veritable cyber militia of approximately 1,000 trusted students from the University of Computer Sciences (UCI) who were recruited to promote the government’s agenda and to slander dissident bloggers and independent journalists.⁵⁸ In February 2013, Yoani Sanchez interviewed blogger Eliécer Avila, a former UCI student—and leader of Operación Verdad.⁵⁹ Referring to the group as the “kilobyte police,” Sanchez stated that the interview “corroborated” theories that the state security had created blogs to “denigrate and discredit the citizen who criticizes the system.”⁶⁰

During the same month, video of a government training on social media appeared on the internet. In the footage, which was apparently leaked, a Cuban official warns agents of the potential threat that activist bloggers pose, alluding to the possibility that a popular blogger like Yoani Sánchez could organize protests in Havana similar to those that occurred in Iran in 2009.⁶¹ He concludes by saying that the government must respond to these threats.

Despite such grave challenges to freedom of expression, a number of activists and bloggers have persisted in making their voices heard. In recent years, Yoani Sánchez, an award-winning dissident writer and the owner of the popular blog *Generation Y*, has become arguably the most visible figure in an independent movement that uses new media to report on conditions that violate basic freedoms. In addition to being vocal on Twitter (Sánchez had over 600,000 followers as of June 2014)⁶² and, increasingly, on the world stage, Sánchez has been hosting Twitter workshops in her home for the past three years, a bold move that has resulted in a crop of hundreds of new Twitter users in Cuba.

In mid-May 2014, following a whirlwind global tour that allowed her to raise awareness of human rights abuses in Cuba and the fight for freedom of information and expression on the island, Sánchez launched the first edition of a new, independent online news site known as *14ymedio* (media begun in the year 2014). Although many expected *14ymedio* to be anti-establishment in nature, Sánchez says that her goal is to provide objective news, allowing Cubans to make their

58 Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *After the Black Spring, Cuba's New Repression* (New York: July 6, 2011), <http://cpj.org/reports/CPJ.Cuba.Report.July.2011.pdf>. See also: *Cambios en Cuba* [Changes in Cuba] (blog): <http://cambiosencuba.blogspot.com/>; *Yohandry's blog*: <http://yohandry.wordpress.com/>; and the official blogger's platform CubaSi: <http://www.cubasi.cu>.

59 Miriam Celaya, “The Internet Has its Own Soul: Eliecer Avila in a Revealing Interview,” *Translating Cuba* (blog), February 21, 2013, <http://translatingcuba.com/category/authors/eliecer-avila/>.

60 Yoani Sanchez, “Operation Truth,” *Translating Cuba* (blog), February 11, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1bj2Ati>.

61 “Coral Negro,” “La Ciber Policia en Cuba” [The Cyber Police in Cuba], Vimeo (Video), posted January 31, 2011, <http://vimeo.com/19402730>; English transcription: <http://translatingcuba.com/?p=7111>; See Also: “Acuse de Recibo: ¿Quién es el Ciberpolicia?” [Acknowledgement of Receipt: Who is the Cyber Policeman?], *Penúltimos Días*, February 5, 2011, <http://www.penultimosdias.com/2011/02/05/acuse-de-recibo-18/>.

62 Yoani Sanchez's Twitter page, accessed March 22, 2013, <https://twitter.com/#!/yoanisanchez/>; See also: Nelson Acosta and Esteban Israel, “Cuba Unblocks Access to Controversial Blog,” Reuters, February 8, 2011, <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCATRE7175YG20110208>; Monica Medel, “Bloggers Celebrate as Cuba Unblocks Their Sites,” *Journalism in the Americas* (blog), <http://knightcenter.utexas.edu/blog/bloggers-celebrate-cuba-unblocks-their-sites>.

own decisions about current events. Reinaldo Escobar, the site's editor-in-chief and Sánchez's husband, stressed this point, saying that writers for *14ymedio* would avoid using politically charged terminology, such as "dictatorship" and "regime."⁶³

In addition to the popularity of independent blogs, young people are increasingly turning to Twitter and mobile phones to document repression and voice their opinions. In a world where internet access is highly restricted, tweeting directly by SMS or a "Speak-to-Tweet" platform offers an alternate avenue for communicating with the outside world. Although associated phone numbers are continually blocked, the speak-to-tweet platform "Háblalo Sin Miedo" (Speak without Fear) has been proactive in finding new phone numbers in order to enable Cuban residents to call a phone number in the United States and record anonymous messages describing government abuses and other grievances.⁶⁴ The messages are automatically converted into posts shared via Twitter and YouTube.⁶⁵ At a cost US\$1.10 per tweet, Háblalo Sin Miedo is expensive; nonetheless, it is proving effective in allowing activists to denounce repressive acts and human rights violations.⁶⁶

Violations of User Rights

Surveillance of ICTs in Cuba is widespread, and dissident bloggers are subject to punishments ranging from fines and searches to confiscation of equipment and detentions. From December 2013 to February 2014, the Cuban government cracked down on opposition surrounding the second annual CELAC summit in Havana, detaining at least 3,000 dissidents and harassing or blocking the mobile phones of others.

The Cuban legal structure is not favorable to internet freedom. The constitution explicitly subordinates freedom of speech to the objectives of a socialist society, and freedom of cultural expression is guaranteed only if such expression is not contrary to the Revolution.⁶⁷ The penal code and Law 88, known as the "Clamp Law," set penalties ranging from a few months to 20 years in prison for any activity considered a "potential risk," "disturbing the peace," a "pre-criminal danger to society," "counterrevolutionary," or "against the national independence or economy."⁶⁸ In 1996, the government passed Decree-Law 209, which states that the internet cannot be used "in violation of Cuban society's moral principles or the country's laws," and that email messages must not "jeopardize national security."⁶⁹ In 2007, a network security measure, Resolution 127, banned the use of public data-transmission networks for the spreading of information that is against the social interest, norms of good behavior, the integrity of people, or national security. The decree requires

63 BBC World News, "Cuban Dissident Yoani Sanchez Launches Online Newspaper," May 21, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-27496620>

64 Juan O. Tamayo, "Regimen Cubano Bloquea Llamadas de Denuncia," *El Nuevo Herald* online, December 7, 2012, <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/2012/12/07/1359290/regimen-cubano-bloquea-llamadas.html>.

65 Háblalo Sin Miedo, "Acerca de" [About us], accessed August, 13, 2012, <http://www.hablaosinmiedo.com/p/como-funciona.html>.

66 Tracey Eaton, "Cuban Dissident Blogger Yoani Sanchez Tours the United States," Florida Center for Investigative Reporting, March 20, 2013, <http://fcir.org/2013/03/20/cuban-dissident-blogger-yoani-sanchez-tours-the-united-states/>.

67 Article 53, available at http://www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const_92_e.htm, accessed July 23, 2010; See also: Article 39, d), available at http://www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const_92_e.htm, accessed July 23, 2010.

68 Committee to Protect Journalists, "International Guarantees and Cuban Law," March 1, 2008, <http://bit.ly/1hbJO4p>.

69 Reporters Without Borders, "Going Online in Cuba: Internet under Surveillance," http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_gb_md_1.pdf.

access providers to install controls that enable them to detect and prevent the proscribed activities, and to report them to the relevant authorities. Furthermore, access to the internet in Cuba generally requires identification with photo ID, rendering anonymity nearly impossible.

Resolution 56/1999 provides that all materials intended for publication or dissemination on the internet must first be approved by the National Registry of Serial Publications. Resolution 92/2003 prohibits email and other ICT service providers from granting access to individuals who are not approved by the government, and requires that they enable only domestic chat services, not international ones. Entities that violate these regulations can be penalized with suspension or revocation of their authorization to provide access.

Despite constitutional provisions that protect various forms of communication and portions of the penal code that establish penalties for the violation of the secrecy of communications, users' privacy is frequently violated. Tools for content surveillance are likewise pervasive. Under Resolution 17/2008, ISPs are required to register and retain the addresses of all traffic for at least one year.⁷⁰ The government routes most connections through proxy servers and is able to obtain all user names and passwords through special monitoring software called Avila Link, which is installed at most ETECSA and public access points. In addition, delivery of email messages is consistently delayed, and it is not unusual for a message to arrive without its attachments.

Under Raúl Castro, the Cuban government appears to have shifted its repressive tactics from long-term imprisonment of bloggers to short-term extralegal detentions, intimidation, and harassment.⁷¹ Bloggers are still routinely summoned for questioning, reprimanded, and detained, however—a phenomenon that spiked in late 2013 and early 2014.⁷²

In November 2013, authorities arrested numerous civil rights activists, including Yoani Sánchez and at least 12 others. Among those detained were Laritza Diversent, an attorney who runs the blog *Jurisconsulto de Cuba*, and Antonio Rodiles, curator of *Estado de Sats*. Diversent and many others were released shortly after detention, but Rodiles was held in police custody for over three weeks. As it is very difficult to distinguish between independent blogging and political activism in Cuba, it is impossible to accurately pinpoint which offence triggered the detentions.

Regardless of whether an activist is flagged by the government for online or offline activity, arrests in Cuba tend to increase surrounding key political events and meetings; late 2013 through early 2014 proved no exception to this rule. In December 2013, members of Ladies in White, a group of the wives and mothers of 75 “anti-Castro” dissidents jailed in 2003, took to the streets to demonstrate

70 “Internet en Cuba: Reglamento para Los Proveedores de Servicios de Acceso a Internet” [Internet in Cuba: Regulations for Internet Service Providers], CubanosUsa.com, December 18, 2008, <http://bit.ly/19NNMfx>.

71 Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *After the Black Spring, Cuba's New Repression*, July 6, 2011, <http://www.cpj.org/reports/2011/07/after-the-black-spring-cubas-new-repression.php>.

72 Daniel Trotta, “Cuban Dissidents Say Political Arrests Top 1,000 in February,” Reuters, March 3, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/03/us-cuba-dissidents-idUSBREA221TB20140303>; See also: Daisy Valera, “This Cuban Woman and Her Online Indiscipline,” *Havana Times* online, March 11, 2012, <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=64077>; Steven L. Taylor, “Cuba vs. the Bloggers,” *Poliblog*, December 6, 2008, <http://www.poliblogger.com/index.php?s=cuba+bloggers>; Marc Cooper, “Cuba's Blogger Crackdown,” *Mother Jones*, December 8, 2008, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2008/12/cubas-blogger-crackdown>.

against human rights abuses on International Human Rights Day, but were detained before the protest could begin.⁷³

Although most were released within hours, threats and arrests of dissidents and activists spiked significantly surrounding the January 2014 Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) summit, which was hosted in Havana. The summit, which convenes the heads of state of member nations, was organized to discuss shared objectives for the region extending to economic goals and a peaceful resolution to the ongoing violence in Colombia between the FARC rebels and the government. More than 3,000 “arbitrary, politically motivated” detentions were reported in the three months surrounding the summit.⁷⁴ The blocking of hundreds of cell phones owned by activists was also reported in the days leading up to the summit.⁷⁵

In addition to the increase in detentions, reporters associated with independent online newspapers were also subject to increased harassment in late 2013 and early 2014. In October 2013, three dissident journalists were arrested within 24 hours. Mario Echevarria Driggs, a journalist with the website *Miscelaneas de Cuba*, was arrested while covering a demonstration in Havana. The next morning, David Aguila Montero, head of the Independent Journalists' Social Agency (ASPI) was arrested as he left his home. A few hours later, William Cacer Diaz, an independent journalist with the online outlet *Hablemos Press*, was arrested en route to the newspaper's headquarters. All three writers were released four days after their arrest, along with Denis Noa Martinez and Pablo Morales Marchan, two additional *Hablemos Press* reporters who had, at that point, been detained for 24 hours.⁷⁶

In late May, *Hablemos Press* was again targeted by the Cuban government. Three of its reporters were detained—and their cellphones were disconnected by state-run ETECSA. A member of the state security also reportedly attacked Roberto de Jesus Guerra, the founder of the site, as he walked to an embassy office to file a story online. Guerra and his wife have also begun receiving anonymous death threats.⁷⁷

As of May 2014, well-known blogger and writer Ángel Santiesteban Prats, who has been serving a five-year jail sentence on trumped-up charges since early 2013, was still imprisoned.⁷⁸ The winner of major literary prizes, Santiesteban was arrested in connection with his political views several times prior to his December 2012 trial. Such harassment increased after Santiesteban's creation of the blog “The Children No One Wanted,” in which he criticized the government. Santiesteban has reportedly

73 AllJazeera Americas, “Cuban Dissidents Detained on Human Rights Day,” December 10, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2013/12/cuban-dissidents-detained-human-rights-day-20131210224649740907.html>

74 Daniel Trotta, “Cuban Dissidents Say Political Arrests Top 1,000 in February,” Reuters, March 3, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/03/us-cuba-dissidents-idUSBREA221TB20140303>

75 Juan O. Tamayo, “Cuban Authorities Harass Dissidents Before Havana Summit,” *Miami Herald*, January 27, 2014, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/01/27/3896572/cuban-authorities-harass-dissidents.html>

76 RSF, “Five Dissident Journalists Freed After Short Detention,” October 15, 2013, http://en.rsf.org/cuba-three-dissident-journalists-14-10-2013_45325.html

77 Juan O. Tamayo, “Top Dissidents Detained in Cuba,” *Miami Herald*, June 11, 2014, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/06/11/4171942/top-dissidents-detained-in-cuba.html>

78 Mary Jo Porter and Heffner Chun, site managers, “Angel Santiesteban,” *Translating Cuba: English Translation of Cuban Bloggers*, April 23, 2013, <http://translatingcuba.com/category/authors/angelsantiesteban>; See also: Angel Santiesteban, “Prison Diary VI: Inside View of the Trial,” *Translating Cuba: English Translation of Cuban Bloggers*, March 28, 2013, <http://translatingcuba.com/prison-diary-vi-the-inside-view-of-the-trial-angel-santiesteban/>.

been subject to mistreatment and torture since his five-year imprisonment began. To date, there is no evidence that he will be released early.⁷⁹

Despite the myriad abuses suffered by dissidents, 2013 brought a notable loosening of travel restrictions in Cuba. As part of immigration reform, bloggers previously denied exit visas, including Yoani Sánchez, Orlando Luis Pardo, and Eliecer Ávila, were allowed to travel abroad. In early 2013, Sánchez, who was finally permitted to leave Cuba after having been denied an exit visa 21 times in the past five years, began an 80-city, 12-country tour, with the aim of bringing awareness to Cuba's active civil society and blogosphere.⁸⁰ Her speeches and online efforts have since received significant international attention. According to Ms. Sanchez's new website, *14ymedio*, a cadre of Google executives visited the island in June 2014 "to promote the virtues of a free and open internet."⁸¹

79 RSF, "Dissident Blogger Completes Year in Detention," February 28, 2014, <http://en.rsf.org/cuba-dissident-blogger-completes-year-28-02-2014.45939.html>

80 Monika Fabian, "Cuban Dissident Yoani Sanchez on the Power of the Hashtag," ABC News/Univision Online, March 18, 2013, http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/News/cuban-dissident-yoani-sanchez-embarks-world-tour/story?id=18749528

81 David Adams, Google Executives Visit Google for First Time to Promote Open Internet, Reuters, June 29, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/29/us-google-cuba-idUSKBN0F30WN20140629>