

World Report 2025 - Cuba

The government continues to repress and punish virtually all forms of dissent and public criticism, as Cubans continue to endure a dire economic crisis affecting rights, including access to health and food.

Hundreds of critics and protesters, including many who took to the streets in July 2021, remain arbitrarily detained. The country faced waves of protests, triggered by blackouts, shortages, and the deterioration of living conditions, as Cubans continue to leave the country in large numbers.

The United States policy of isolation toward Cuba remains in place, including a decades-long embargo and a designation of the country as a State Sponsor of Terrorism.

Arbitrary Detention and Prosecution

The authorities, as in previous years, arbitrarily detained, harassed and intimidated critics, independent activists, political opponents, and others. Many were at various times held incommunicado, with some facing ill-treatment, and in some cases torture.

Following protests in March as a result of power outages and food shortages, rights groups documented at least 20 people detained. In June, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) [determined](#) that the detention of 17 people apprehended after the July 2021 protests, the largest since the Cuban revolution, was arbitrary. Rights groups reported that over 650 protesters, including over 40 women, are behind bars.

Prosecutors often framed as criminal behavior actions such as criticizing the government on social media or protesting peacefully, which are lawful exercises of freedoms of expression and association.

Migration

Between January and August 2024, the US Border Patrol apprehended Cubans more than 97,000 times, which may include multiple encounters with the same people. Many traveled north on the way to the US through Nicaragua, which waived visa requirements for Cubans in 2021.

According to official figures, the Cuban population shrunk by 10 percent between December 2021 and December 2023, mostly due to emigration.

In August, the National Assembly passed a bill that would allow the government to strip Cubans abroad of their nationality if they “carry out acts contrary to the high political, economic and social interests of the Republic of Cuba.” At time of writing, it had not been signed into law.

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The economic crisis in Cuba severely impacted the enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights as Cubans endured electricity blackouts, in some places for up to 20 hours a day, and acute shortages of food, medicine, and other essential items.

In October, Cubans suffered a nationwide blackout that affected 10 out of Cuba’s 11 million people. Some parts of the country had no electricity for up to 70 hours.

In February, Cuba [requested](#) assistance from the UN World Food Programme (WFP) for the first time. It asked the WFP to provide powdered milk for children under seven years old. In April, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and its Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural, and Environmental Rights “expressed concern over the recent worsening of food insecurity and prolonged power outages in Cuba.”

Political Prisoners

Prisoners Defenders, a Madrid-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) reported that as of August, Cuba held over 1,000 people, including 30 children under age 18, as political prisoners.

Government critics risk criminal prosecution, and are not guaranteed due process, such as the right to fair and public hearings by a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal. In practice, courts are subordinate to the executive branch.

Maykel Castillo Pérez and Manuel Otero Alcántara remain in jail. Castillo Pérez, a musician and human rights activist and co-writer of the song “Patria y Vida” (Motherland and Life), which criticizes the Cuban government, was detained in May 2021 and has been in prison ever since. Otero Alcántara was arrested in July 2021 after announcing in a video that he would join the protests.

José Daniel Ferrer, leader of the Cuban Patriotic Union, the main opposition party, remained in prison at year’s end. A court in Santiago de Cuba sentenced him to four and a half years of “restrictions on freedom” for alleged “assault” in 2020. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention deemed the case as arbitrary. In 2021, officers detained Ferrer as he was heading to a demonstration, and a court ruled that Ferrer failed to comply with the “restrictions on freedom,” and sent him to the Mar Verde prison. His relatives said he has been held incommunicado for long periods and suffers health problems. In a resolution adopted in September, the European Parliament [called](#) for Ferrer’s immediate release and the release of others arbitrarily detained.

Rights group Justicia 11J reported that families of political prisoners have faced state harassment, with security agents, in several instances, calling or visiting the homes of relatives to harass and dissuade them from speaking out against abuses.

Prison Conditions

Prisons are often overcrowded. Detainees have no effective complaint mechanism to seek redress for abuses.

The government continues to deny Cuban and international human rights groups access to prisons, while rights organizations and journalists report food shortages, inadequate access to health care, and outbreaks of tuberculosis.

Freedom of Expression

The government controls virtually all media in Cuba, restricts access to outside information, and periodically censors critics and independent journalists.

Increased access to the internet has enabled activists to communicate, report on abuses, and organize protests. Some journalists and bloggers publish news articles and videos on social media, including X and Facebook, and the website 14yMedio. Authorities routinely block access to many news websites within Cuba and repeatedly impose targeted, and at times widespread, restrictions on critics’ access to mobile phone data.

In April, a court in Camagüey sentenced Miyelín Rodríguez Prado to 15 years in jail for streaming images of protests in Nuevitas on Facebook. The tribunal said Rodríguez Prado's streaming amounted to "enemy propaganda."

International Actors

Authorities in Cuba continue to use the US embargo as a pretext for abuses and a way to garner sympathy from governments that might otherwise condemn Cuba's repressive practices.

US President Joe Biden has not lifted former President Donald Trump's re-designation of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism, which according to UN experts, has further undermined the ability of Cuban authorities to provide social and other services in the country.