



## Country Overview: Cuba



Government:	Communist
President:	Raúl Castro
Population:	11 million
Ethnic Groups:	White 64.1%, Mestizo 26.6%, Black 9.3% <sup>[1]</sup>
Religions:	Christian 59.2%, Atheist 23%, Folk Religions 17.4%, Other .4% <sup>[2]</sup>

## Challenges to Religious Freedom

Ever since the corrupt dictatorship was overthrown by the revolution in 1959, the dogmatic Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) has controlled the Cuban government under the Castro regime. Cuba was officially recognized as an atheist state until the fall of the USSR when the constitution revision redefined Cuba as a

secular state.<sup>[3]</sup> Cuba's legacy of rigorous government control persists today. The state rules over civil society and religious groups ensuring that the communist ideology is not challenged. In 2015, Pope Francis' visit loosened government control over the Catholic church. However, some have criticized the Catholic Church for aligning closely to the state and not defending dissenters.<sup>[4]</sup> The U.S. re-established diplomatic relations with Cuba in 2015, yet Cuba has refused to issue a travel visa to the chairmen of the House Foreign Affairs committee to survey the human rights and religious freedom climate of the country. Furthermore, Christian converts, especially former members of the PCC, have experienced structural discrimination in employment and higher education.<sup>[5]</sup>

### Laws and Society

Cuba's constitution supports separation of church and state, but contradictory legislation controls religious affairs. This elevates the protection of state ideology above that of religious institutions and individual conscience. The Cuban penal code permits incarceration of anyone who allows religious conviction to compromise Communist education, labor, defense, or respect of Communist symbols. The ambiguity of these categories gives the state additional means to control civil society and religious affairs.<sup>[6]</sup>

### Regulatory Agencies

These restrictive legal provisions are primarily overseen by the Communist Party's Office of Religious Affairs (ORA) and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). In order for a religious group or association to be legal,

it must registered with MOJ and be checked by the authority's religious watchdog, the ORA. Religious groups must get ORA-issued permits and/or approval for essential activities such as the right to hold public religious services.<sup>[7]</sup>

### Church Persecution

Due to the difficulty in obtaining state recognition, house churches have flourished. The State Department estimated that anywhere from 2,000-10,000 house churches exist in the country. Cuba tightly controls house churches, demanding the names and demographics of attendees.

## Testimony of Persecution

### Emanuel Church

February 2016—Emanuel Church, an unregistered Protestant denomination, was attacked by authorities. While Reverend Alain Toledano was out of the country authorities stormed his home in Santiago, Cuba at 5:00 a.m. and detained his wife. To prevent church members from protesting church demolition, the authorities arbitrarily detained and abused 200 members and leaders.<sup>[8]</sup>

### Ladies in White

The Damas de Blanco are members of the Roman Catholic Church and the Patriotic Union of Cuba. These wives and relatives of political prisoners have been targeted and assaulted by authorities for their peaceful Sunday protest marches to mass. During Pope Francis' 2015 visit, they were prevented from attending his events and their leader was reportedly arrested. Other Ladies in White have also been detained and beaten.<sup>[9]</sup>

### References:

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/cu.html>

<sup>[2,5]</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2050/percent/all/>

<sup>[3,7]</sup> <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238748.pdf>

<sup>[4]</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/cuba>

<sup>[5]</sup> [www.csw.org.uk/our\\_work\\_profile\\_cuba.htm](http://www.csw.org.uk/our_work_profile_cuba.htm)

<sup>[6,10]</sup> <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016/01/15/report/2951/article.htm>

<sup>[8]</sup> <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016/02/09/news/2977/article.htm>

<sup>[9]</sup> <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016/03/07/news/3009/article.htm>

## Call to Action



### STUDY

Reflect on these passages and thank God that He is working in Cuba...

- James 1:12
- 1 Peter 5:8-10
- Hebrews 10:23-25



### PRAY

- For the house church attendees and leaders who are restricted and jeopardized by the state
- For the Ladies in White and other groups that face ongoing state oppression
- That the Cuban government would allow US legislators into the country to evaluate Cuba's human rights climate
- That the US would utilize its political influence on Cuba to stress human rights and religious freedom be prioritized.



### LEARN

- Discover more about the struggle for religious freedom in Cuba and government oppression of the church by using the footnote to download Christian Solidarity Worldwide's report on Cuba.<sup>[10]</sup>



### STAND

Stand in solidarity with these people of faith by becoming informed and subscribing to Wilberforce's e-newsletter at [21wilberforce.org](http://21wilberforce.org), like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter [@21Wilberforce](https://twitter.com/21Wilberforce)



As religious freedom advocates, we mobilize and equip partners, including Christians, activists and people of other faiths, to promote global protections and reforms through Advocacy, Capacity Building and Technology.