

CUBA COUNTRY PROFILE

The recorded history of Cuba began on October 28, 1492, when Christopher Columbus sighted the island during his first voyage of discovery and claimed it for Spain. Since its occupation and settlement in 1511, Cuba remained a Spanish possession until 1898 (except for eleven months during the 1762–63 English takeover of Havana), ruled by a colonial governor, first in Santiago and later in Havana. Since the late eighteenth century, Cuba's economy relied increasingly on plantation agriculture and the export of sugar, coffee, and tobacco to Europe and North America. The massive importation of enslaved Africans bolstered the island's economy throughout the nineteenth century.

Cuba's proximity to the United States has been a powerful influence in its history. The U.S. government attempted to annex or purchase the island from the Spanish government throughout the nineteenth century. Spain, however, refused to cede one of its two last possessions in the Americas.

The first major armed rebellion against Spain resulted in the Ten Years' War (1868–78). The Spanish government finally abolished slavery in Cuba in 1886. Rebellion against Spain broke out again in April 1895, and the United States intervened in the armed conflict after the explosion of the USS *Maine* in Havana Harbor in April 1898. Cuba gained formal independence on May 20, 1902. The United States ended the military occupation and the young republic emerged under the presidency of Tomás Estrada Palma, a hero of the War of Independence. The next military occupation, predicated upon the Platt Amendment, lasted from 1906 to 1909 under a provisional government. The United States intervened in Cuba again in 1912 and 1917–22.

Political turmoil ensued during the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado (1929–33), ended by the first of several coup d'états that eventually led to what some historians call "the Age of Democracy" in Cuba (1940–52). The 1940 Constitution included a wide range of social, economic, and political reforms such as the creation of a minimum wage and extended social security benefits. In 1952, General Fulgencio Batista deposed President Carlos Prío Socarrás, canceled the constitution, and suspended elections.

Fighting in the eastern mountains of the island since 1956, Fidel Castro's guerrillas mounted a counteroffensive against the Batista dictatorship. Following Batista's flight from the island, Castro and his guerrillas entered Havana triumphantly on January 8, 1959. Soon after, Cuba turned to the Soviet Union for support after the U.S. government imposed an embargo on the island. In 1961, the U.S. and Cuba severed diplomatic relations and the U.S.-backed Bay of Pigs invasion failed. Antagonism between the two countries escalated during the Missile Crisis in 1962, resolved by an agreement between the USSR and the U.S.

The trade embargo continues to be the linchpin of the U.S.-Cuba relationship. Whereas some U.S. administrations have relaxed the more stringent prohibitions to allow the purchasing and shipping of food and medicine, others have curtailed humanitarian and cultural exchanges as well as family visits to Cuba.

Fidel Castro held effective power until July 2006, when he temporarily handed over his duties to his brother Raúl Castro, due to medical reasons.

Cuba's National Assembly elected Raúl Castro president in February 2008. In December 2014, Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro announced that they would take steps to resume diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba.

The two countries reopened embassies in their respective capitals in July 2015. However, a series of health attacks of an unknown nature against U.S. diplomats and their families in Havana chilled U.S.-Cuba relations under President Donald Trump's administration in 2017.

In April 2018, the National Assembly of People's Power selected Miguel Díaz-Canel as president of Cuba, but Raúl Castro remained first secretary of the Communist Party. In July, the Cuban government proposed the draft of a new constitution, which was approved in a referendum in February 2019. Castro resigned as first secretary of Cuba's Communist Party in April 2021, and Díaz-Canel assumed that position.

On July 11, 2021, thousands of Cubans took to the streets to protest the scarcity of medicine, food, fuel, and other basic necessities on the Island, as well as to demand freedom and criticize the communist government. The Biden administration expressed its support of people's right to demonstrate peacefully and condemned the Cuban government's violent response to the protests.

(Portions of this text were adapted from the entry on "Cuba" for the *New World Encyclopedia*.)

Main Sources of Statistical Information: Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* (2023); Cuba, Oficina Nacional de Estadística e Información, *Estadísticas de Cuba* (2023).

GEOGRAPHY

The Republic of Cuba consists of the island of Cuba, the Isle of Youth, and more than 1,600 adjacent keys and small islands. The archipelago lies west of the northern Caribbean Sea, east of the Gulf of Mexico, and west of the Atlantic Ocean. Cuba is located south of the eastern United States and the Bahamas, west of the Turks and Caicos Islands and Haiti, east of Mexico, and north of the Cayman Islands and Jamaica. It is 150 km (93.3 mi) south of Key West, Florida.

Geographic Coordinates: 21 30 N, 80 00 W

Surface Area

- Total: 110,860 km² (42,803 mi²)
- Land: 109,884 km² (42,426 mi²)

Forest Area

32,420 km² (12,517 mi², 2020)

Agricultural Land

Three-quarters of Cuba's land area are fertile, with enough naturally occurring water to allow for intensive cultivation. The soil is mostly red clay with some sand and limestone hills. The main crops under cultivation are sugarcane, rice, citrus fruit, potatoes, plantains and bananas, cassava (manioc), tomatoes, corn (maize), and tobacco.

Land Use

- Arable land: 2,908.6 (1000 ha) (28% of total land area)
- Land under permanent crops: 653 (1000 ha) (6.3%)
- Irrigated land: 560 (1000 ha) (2018)

Topography

Cuba has three major mountain ranges: the Sierra de los Órganos in the west, the Sierra de Trinidad-Escambray Mountains in the south-central region, and the Sierra Maestra in the east, which contains the Turquino Peak, Cuba's tallest mountain at 1,974 m (6,476 feet) above sea level. Plains cover about two-thirds of the main island of Cuba; the main mountainous regions lie in the southeast and center of the island.

Coastline—5,746 km (3,570.4 mi)

Cuba's coastline to the north has deep harbors, coral lowlands, and white, sandy beaches. The southern shore has coral islands, reefs, and swamps. The largest harbors are in Havana, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Nuevitas, Guantánamo, and Santiago de Cuba.

Rivers

Of Cuba's more than six hundred rivers and streams, only two are navigable. The Cauto, located in the southeast and 343 km (213 mi) long, provides only 110 km (70 mi) of transport waterway. The Sagua la Grande, in central Cuba, is large enough (163 km or 101 mi) to provide hydroelectric power and is navigable for short stretches. The rest of the rivers are small and shallow, but several are internationally known for their fishing.

Climate

The island has a warm tropical climate, moderated by northeasterly trade winds and the surrounding waters. The warm temperatures of the Caribbean Sea, and the fact that Cuba itself almost completely blocks access to the Gulf of Mexico, make Cuba prone to frequent hurricanes. The dry season lasts from November to April; the rainy season lasts from May to October. The average temperature is 21°C (70°F) in January and 27°C (81°F) in July.

Natural Resources

Cobalt, nickel, iron ore, chromium, copper, salt, timber, silica, petroleum, arable land

Environment

Current issues: soil degradation and desertification; biodiversity loss; deforestation; air and water pollution

International agreements: Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Climate Change-Paris Agreement, Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping-London Convention, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands

Signed but not ratified: Marine Life Conservation

Major Cities

Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Camagüey, Holguín, Santa Clara, Guantánamo, Bayamo, Las Tunas, Cienfuegos, Pinar del Río, Matanzas, Ciego de Ávila, Sancti Spíritus, Manzanillo, Cárdenas, Palma Soriano

Capital: Havana

PEOPLE

Population

Total population: 10,055,968 (2023)

- Urban: 77.1%
- Rural: 22.9% (2022)

Density: 91.5 persons/km² (237 persons/mi², 2023)

Growth: -2.1/1,000 population

Net migration rate: -2.92 migrants/1,000 population (2022)

Median Age

Total: 42.6 years

- Male: 41.0 years
- Female: 44.3 years (2022)

Age Distribution

- 0–14 years: 15.6%
- 15–59 years: 62.1%
- 60 years and over: 22.3% (2022)

Sex Ratio

- 0–14 years: 1.06 males/female
- 15–64 years: 1.00 males/female
- 65 years and over: 0.51 males/female
- Total population: 0.98 males/female (2022)

Race, Ethnic Groups, and Migration

Cuba is a multiracial and multiethnic society with a population of mainly Spanish and African origins. The island's indigenous population, predominantly Taino, was decimated shortly after the Spanish conquest beginning in 1511. Migration has had noticeable effects on the island's demographic history. Cuba imported more than 855,000 enslaved Africans during the nineteenth century. About 150,000 Chinese contract workers were brought to the island between 1847 and 1874. Approximately 785,000 Spaniards and 311,000 immigrants from other Caribbean islands (especially Haiti and Jamaica) arrived in Cuba between 1902 and 1933. Smaller numbers of Jewish and Arab immigrants from several countries settled on the island during the first half of the twentieth century.

According to the latest (2012) census, the racial composition of Cuba's population was as follows:

- White: 64.1%
- Mixed (*mestizo/mulato*): 26.6%
- Black: 9.3%

Between 1959 and 2022, more than 1.7 million Cubans moved to the United States and Puerto Rico. At least 300,000 more settled in other countries such as Spain, Mexico, and Venezuela. In 2022, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that more than 2.4 million people of Cuban origin lived in the United States; approximately two-thirds (nearly 1.6 million) lived in Florida.

In August 2024, U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported that 645,122 unauthorized citizens of Cuba had been apprehended and/or expelled trying to enter the

United States during fiscal years 2021–24, beginning in October and ending in September. This figure represents the largest number of Cuban emigrants registered in the history of Cuba, before or after the 1959 Revolution.

Language: Spanish

Cuban Spanish is a variety of the Spanish language spoken in Cuba and in Cuban communities outside the island. It shares several pronunciation and vocabulary features of the Spanish spoken in the Caribbean, the Canary Islands, and Andalusia. Its grammatical structure is practically identical to standard Spanish throughout Latin America and Spain.

Religion

Catholicism was Cuba’s official religion since the Spanish conquest and colonization in the sixteenth century. Church and State have been separated only since the first republican constitution of 1902. In the 1950s, approximately 85 percent of all Cubans were nominally members of the Roman Catholic Church, but only about 10 percent were practicing Catholics.

In 1961, Cuba officially became an atheistic state and restricted religious practices. Although the 1992 constitution redefined Cuba as a secular state that recognizes the right of citizens to freedom of religion, the government, through the Ministry of the Interior, engages in active efforts to control and monitor religious institutions. Nevertheless, the island’s population practices many religions reflecting diverse cultural traditions.

Catholicism is the most prevalent professed faith. In 2009, the Catholic Church estimated that 60 percent of the Cuban population was Catholic, but only 5 percent regularly attended Mass. Popular religiosity largely consists of syncretic practices of various kinds, such as *Santería* or *Regla de Ocha*, a mixture of Catholic and African beliefs.

Approximately 5 percent of the Cuban population belongs to various Protestant denominations, especially Pentecostals, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, and Methodists. Other groups include Jehovah’s Witnesses, Muslims, Jews, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Buddhists, Baha’is, and Mormons.

HEALTH

The Cuban government assumes full responsibility for the health care of its citizens. In 1983, it adopted the Public Health Law, which lays out the general activities to protect the health of Cuban citizens and guarantees the right to free health care. The National Health System is organized at three levels (national, provincial, and municipal), which mirror the country’s administrative structure. Cuba’s state budget subsidizes its health system. No private hospitals or clinics operate on the island. The government controls the distribution and pricing of medicines.

Since the 1960s, the Cuban government has sent healthcare personnel to more than 150 countries. In 2020, the export of health services accounted for 58 percent of the island’s

service exports, making it a major exchange earner (between \$6 and \$8 billion). The U.S. government and several human rights organizations have denounced these medical missions as forms of “modern slavery” because of numerous labor abuses against Cuban healthcare workers.

Life Expectancy at Birth

Total population: 77.7 years (2022)

- Male: 75.3 years
- Female: 80.1 years

Birth Rate: 8.6 births/1,000 persons

Death Rate: 10.8 deaths/1,000 persons

Infant Mortality Rate: 7.5 deaths/1,000 live births

Total Fertility Rate: 1.41 children born per woman

Other Health Indicators

- Physicians per 1,000 inhabitants: 9.49 (2021)
- HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate: 0.5% (2021 est.)
- HIV/AIDS—people living with HIV/AIDS: 33,000 (2020)
- HIV/AIDS—deaths: 398 (2021)

EDUCATION

Cuba has had one of the highest rates of schooling and literacy in Latin America, before and after the Revolution. The government nationalized all schools and universities in 1961. All education is free of charge to Cuban citizens, including university education. Private educational institutions are not permitted. School attendance is compulsory from ages six to sixteen.

School Enrollment (Primary): 99.8%

- Male: 99.9%
- Female: 96.7% (2018)

School Enrollment (Secondary): 84.4%

- Male: 82.2%
- Female: 86.8% (2018)

School Enrollment (Tertiary): 28.2% (2019)

(Persons aged between eighteen and twenty-four who are enrolled in institutions of higher education)

- Male: 30.1%
- Female: 51.2% (2017)

Literacy Rate

(Persons aged fifteen and over who can read and write)

Total population: 99.7% (2021)

- Male: 99.9%
- Female: 99.8% (2015 est.)

ECONOMY

The Cuban government continues to adhere to socialist principles in organizing its economy and owns most of the means of production. The government imposed tighter state controls after some attempts at economic liberalization in the 1990s. While a policy of recentralization made it difficult for foreigners to conduct business on the island, the reversion to a peso economy in 2004 adversely affected ordinary Cuban citizens.

Austerity and inefficiency in a state-controlled economy have created conditions for an informal economy, where perhaps 40 percent of goods and services operate. Raúl Castro began several economic reforms in 2007, including the promotion of self-employment and the transfer of lands in usufruct to stimulate agricultural production. In 2021, the government legalized small- and medium-sized private enterprises for the first time since 1968. By 2023, more than 8,300 companies had been incorporated in Cuba and about 35% of the island's labor force was employed in the private sector.

Since the 1990s, remittances have played a growing role in Cuba's economy. Although Cuba does not publish statistics on this topic, informed sources estimate that remittances reached \$3.7 billion in 2019, with most coming from relatives in the United States. The influx of remittances decreased substantially after October 2020, when the U.S. government prohibited monetary transfers to the island through companies controlled by the Cuban military. Remittance flows formally resumed in June 2022 when the U.S. government eased restrictions on sending cash to Cuba. In November 2022, Western Union reestablished regular service between the United States and Cuba. The island received an estimated \$2 billion in remittances in 2022.

The island is currently experiencing its worst economic crisis since the early 1990s. The economy plunged by 10.9 percent in 2020, amidst the coronavirus pandemic and the collapse of the tourist industry. In 2021, the Cuban government eliminated its dual

currency system, established in 1993, resulting in galloping inflation and an increase in the cost of living.

Currency: CUP (Cuban peso)

1 Cuban peso = 100 centavos

Exchange Rate: 120 CUP = 1 U.S. dollar (August 2022)

GDP (Current US\$): \$107.35 billion (2020)

GDP Growth: -1.9% (2023)

GDP per Capita (Constant 2015 Dollars): \$7,156.1 (2020)

Major Exports and Imports

- Exports—cigars, nickel, sugar, rum, zinc, pharmaceutical products, citrus
- Imports—petroleum, food, machinery and equipment, chemicals

Main Export Destinations: Canada (34%), China (19%), Spain (16%), the Netherlands (5%), Germany (2%) (2022)

Main Origin of Imports: Venezuela (20%), China (12%), Spain (10%), Russia (9%), Mexico (4%) (2022)

Inflation Rate: 135% (August 2022 est.)

Labor Force: 4.591 million people (2022)

- State sector: 64.3%
- Non-state sector: 35.7%

Labor Force by Sector of Employment

- Agriculture: 19.3%
- Industry: 9.1%
- Services: 72.6% (2022)

Unemployment Rate: 1.8% (2022)

External Debt: \$28.7 billion (2020 est.)

GOVERNMENT

The Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, revised in 2019, defines it as a socialist State. The current government assumed power by force on January 1, 1959.

Political Parties

The Cuban Constitution defines the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) as “the organized vanguard of the Cuban nation” and “the highest leading political force of society and of the State.” No opposition parties are legally recognized in Cuba. The leadership structure of the Communist Party consists of the following:

- The First Secretary General of the Central Committee
- The Second Secretary General of the Central Committee
- Members of the Central Committee, including secretaries and presidents of political organizations

Executive Branch

- Chief of State: Miguel Díaz-Canel, President of the Republic of Cuba (since October 2019; first elected as President of the Council of State and the Council of Ministers in April 2018; reelected in April 2023)
- Vice President: Salvador Valdés Mesa (elected in April 2018; reelected in April 2023)
- Prime Minister: Manuel Marrero Cruz (appointed in December 2019; reappointed in April 2023)

Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers is the highest-ranking executive and administrative body of the Republic of Cuba. Its membership includes the Prime Minister, Vice Prime Ministers, Ministers, Secretary, and other members established by law.

Legislative Branch

The National Assembly of People’s Power has supreme legislative authority in Cuba. It currently has 470 members from single-member electoral districts who serve five-year terms. It meets twice a year for a few days each time. Between sessions, the Council of Ministers holds legislative power. The most recent elections took place in March 2023.

The National Assembly of People’s Power elects the thirty-one members of the Council of State as well as the Council of Ministers, the members of the Supreme Court, and the Attorney General Office of Cuba. The current president of the National Assembly of People’s Power is Juan Esteban Lazo Hernández.

Judicial Branch

The People’s Supreme Court is the highest body of judicial power and the court of last resort. The National Assembly of People’s Power elects the justices of the Supreme Court, who are not subject to a specific term. Provincial and municipal assemblies appoint lay judges in lower courts for five-year terms.

The People's Supreme Court includes a president, vice president, and professional and lay judges in the following courts: the full court, the Council of State, criminal, civil, administrative, labor, crimes-against-the-state, and military courts. The current president of the People's Supreme Court is Rubén Remigio Ferro.

Human Rights

Title V of the 2019 Cuban Constitution characterizes human rights as “nonrenounceable, indivisible, and interdependent,” including the rights to privacy; freedom of movement; freedom of thought, conscience, and expression; freedom of the press; the rights to assembly, demonstration, and association; freedom of religion; and the rights to work, shelter, health care, and education. Despite these guarantees, critics have accused the Cuban government of numerous violations of human rights since 1959 and of denying access to prisons to recognized human rights groups. The government places severe limitations on freedom of speech, press, and movement, and does not tolerate dissent.

Trade Unions

Cuba has nineteen trade unions, with a membership of 68.7 percent of the island's workforce in 2018. All unions are part of the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC). While supporters claim that officers are elected on an open basis and the membership can influence governmental decisions, opponents claim that the government uses the CTC to control unions, while prohibiting the creation of independent trade unions and Cuban law does not recognize the right to strike.

Administrative Provinces

Cuba contains fifteen provinces and one special municipality: Artemisa, Camagüey, Ciego de Ávila, Cienfuegos, Granma, Guantánamo, Holguín, La Habana, Las Tunas, Matanzas, Mayabeque, Pinar del Río, Sancti Spíritus, Santiago de Cuba, Villa Clara, and the Isle of Youth, the special municipality.

National Holidays

- January 1: Liberation Day
- May 1: Labor Day
- July 26: Commemoration of the assault on the Moncada garrison
- October 10: Anniversary of the beginning of the first war of independence
- December 25: Christmas (reinstated in 1998 after Pope John Paul II's visit)

Membership in International Organizations

ACP, ALBA, AOSIS, CELAC, FAO, G-77, IAEA, ICAO, ICC (national committees), ICRM, IFAD, IFRCS, IHO, ILO, IMO, IMSO, Interpol, IOC, IOM (observer), IPU, ISO, ITSO,

ITU, LAES, LAIA, NAM, OPANAL, OPCW, PCA, Petrocaribe, UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, Unión Latina, UNWTO, UPU, WCO, WFTU (NGOs), WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO

Major International Treaties

Vienna Convention (ozone—1992); UNFCCC (climate change—1994); UNCLOS (LAW OF THE SEA—1984); UNCCD (desertification); Ramsar Convention (wetlands—2001); Kyoto Protocol (CO₂ emissions—2002); CMS (migratory species treaty); CITES (species trade treaty—1990)

MEDIA

The Cuban Constitution stipulates that “the fundamental means of social communication” are “socialist property.” Hence, the Cuban government owns and controls the island’s printed press as well as radio and television stations. Nonetheless, an independent digital media has emerged in Cuba, which provides alternative voices to the state-run media. Anti-government propaganda and insulting of officials carry prison sentences. Intimidation of journalists by threats of jail and loss of jobs is customary.

Cuba’s three major newspapers are published in Havana and include *Granma*, the official newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party, with several weekly international editions available in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese; *Juventud Rebelde*, the publication of the Union of Communist Youth; and *Trabajadores*, the official organ of Cuba’s Central Workers’ Union. Magazines also published in Havana include *Bohemia*, published weekly, and *Mujeres*, monthly. Prensa Latina, the Cuban wire service, covers international affairs and distributes information throughout Latin America.

All telephone service is free. Cuba has three television stations: Cubavisión, Tele Rebelde, and CHTV, a subsidiary of Tele Rebelde. Radio stations are Radio Rebelde, Radio Reloj, Radio Enciclopedia, Radio Habana Cuba, Radio Progreso, CMBF-Radio Musical Nacional, and Radio Taíno. Cuba has two state news agencies, Agencia de Información Nacional (AIN) and Prensa Latina.

In January 2023, Cuba reported nearly eight million Internet users, or 71.1 percent of the population. The Cuban government controls access to the Internet through the telecommunications state monopoly, ETECSA (Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A.). Only 33 percent of households on the island has access to the Internet at home.

MILITARY

Under Fidel Castro, Cuba became a highly militarized society. Soviet subsidies enabled Cuba to upgrade its military capabilities and exert power abroad. Since the loss of those subsidies in the 1990s, the armed forces have shrunk considerably in numbers and assets. Still, Cuba’s Ministry of the Interior oversees a large state security apparatus to repress dissent and has formed special units to confront popular unrest. The military plays a leading role in the economy and manages GAESA (Grupo de Administración Empresarial S.A.), which controls the tourist and financial sectors of the economy.

The United States has maintained a naval base at Guantánamo Bay since the early 20th century, despite protests from the Cuban government.

Armed Forces: Branches

The Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) include the Revolutionary Army, the Revolutionary Navy, the Revolutionary Air and Air Defense Force, and the Youth Labor Army.

Compulsory Military Service: for males 16–28 years of age; two-year service obligation

Military and Security Service Personnel: Limited available information

Estimated 50,000 active personnel (approximately 40,000 Army; 3,000 Navy; 8,000 Air Force) (2022)

Updated in August 2024