

## IRI Cuba Index

Over the course of its public opinion survey work in Cuba dating back to 2007, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has followed a number of indicators that track changes in the mood and opinions of the Cuban people. The latest survey was conducted January 28 - February 10, 2011. Among the trends that the data points to:

- Cubans still overwhelmingly desire democracy and freedom in their country, including multi-party elections and freedom of expression. The response rate signifying this desire is higher than at any time since Raul Castro assumed the presidency of Cuba in 2008.
- Due to restrictions on access, only one out of 20 adults in Cuba report ever going online.
- More than 90 percent of Cubans want a market economy system, with economic freedoms, opportunities to own property, and the right to own businesses.
- Citizens remain very concerned with their economic future and more than three of four Cuban citizens (77 percent) do not have confidence that their government will succeed in solving this challenge.
- Contrary to Cuban government reports that seven million citizens participated in town hall style meetings leading up to the April 16 Communist Party Congress, nearly 78 percent of survey respondents report they did not.

### **Findings:**

#### *Desire for Fundamental Change*

- More than three-in-four Cuban adults would vote for fundamental political change (78 percent) if given the opportunity, and nine-in-ten citizens (91 percent) would support economic change. While a vast majority of Cuban citizens across the board support change, there is a clear correlation between age, education, and support for change. However a majority of every demographic group, including a majority of citizens born before 1959 – the cohort generally described as most loyal to the regime – indicate they favor both political and economic change.
- As the Cuban government approaches their Communist Party Congress on April 16, only 19 percent of citizens say that had even minimal levels of involvement in community and/or local discussions regarding local needs or desired reforms. This figure is at odds with Cuban government claims that more than seven million citizens were involved in local forums.

#### *Economic Concerns*

- Economic concerns remain predominant in Cubans' lives with well over three-quarters of Cuban citizens (85 percent) citing low salaries and the high cost of living (61 percent), food scarcity (13 percent) or challenges with the island's double-currency system (12 percent) as

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their biggest concern. In general, older respondents are more concerned with issues such as food scarcity while younger respondents and those with a higher level of education focus their immediate concerns on low salaries and the high cost of living.

- Notably the problem of food scarcity (13 percent) remains the second most commonly cited problem, despite Raul Castro's launch of limited agricultural reforms beginning in 2008. Recent cuts in subsidies of basic foodstuffs and the move to eliminate the ration card further highlight the struggles that Cubans will continue to face with regard to access to food.

### *Increased Pessimism*

- Cuban citizens are losing confidence in their government's ability to address problems and needs. While [in 2008](#), 27 percent of Cubans felt that the government *could* solve Cuba's biggest problem, now only 14 percent believe that to be true. Overall, more than three-in-four Cuban citizens (77 percent) do *not* have confidence that their government will succeed in solving their problems.
- Forty-four percent of interviewees stated that their economic situation was worse now than two years ago, in the aftermath of two major hurricanes.

### *Cubans' Lack of Access to Information Technology*

- Cuban access to information technology is limited in both breadth and medium, with the state controlling the right to own and use telecommunication services. *Less than five percent* of Cubans have access to the Internet, while only 23 percent of Cubans have any access to an e-mail account. It is important to note that these numbers indicate individuals who have some level of access at work or elsewhere, since home internet connections remain unavailable to Cuban citizens.

Of the small percentage that have any form of access, three-fourths (75 percent) have access of weekly or less, and less than one-third reported daily access (24 percent). This data reflects why Cuba is considered one of the most closed societies in the world when it comes to information and technology access.

- Despite growth in the number of cellular users since the government allowed citizens to purchase cell phones in 2008, only 25 percent of Cubans report having *access to use* a cell phone. (The phrasing of IRI's question yields a higher number than the actual cellular penetration rate of about [10 percent](#), as individual cellphones are typically shared among family and friends. The proportional change in IRI's access rate since its previous poll in late 2009 mirrors industry data on the increase in mobile subscribers).

Cuba still lags far behind other countries in Latin America with the lowest mobile phone penetration – significantly below the second lowest, Haiti at 35 percent, and well below the regional average of 90 percent.

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