



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 June 30 – July 13, 2011. Among the trends that the data points to:

- Cubans still overwhelmingly (76 percent) desire multi-party elections, free expression and other elements associated with political freedom and democracy.
- More than half of Cuban citizens have not seen evidence of actual reforms taking shape in Cuba.
- Approximately three-in-five Cubans do not believe substantive economic reform is possible *without* changes to the political system.
- Nearly nine-in-10 (88 percent) Cubans desire a market economy, with economic freedoms, opportunities to own private property and the right to own their own businesses.
- Cubans remain very concerned with their economic future; more than two-thirds (70 percent) do not have confidence that their government will succeed in solving this challenge.
- Despite international perceptions that Cubans are increasingly using the Internet, less than seven percent of the population has access – one of the lowest percentages in the world.
- While the use of cellphones is pervasive throughout Latin America and the Caribbean only 22 percent of Cubans have *access* to these devices.

Findings:

Lack of Confidence

- Cubans have little 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 21 percent believe that to be true. Overall, more than seven of 10 Cuban citizens (70 percent) do *not* have confidence that their government will succeed in solving their problems.
- Pessimism is predominant among those individuals that cite economic concerns (low salaries, high cost of living and the double currency issue) as their number one issue, with more than two-thirds (69 percent) expressing no confidence in the government to address the top priorities of the country.

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Economic Concerns

- Economic concerns remain predominant in Cubans' lives with more than three-quarters of citizens citing either low salaries and the high cost of living (61 percent), or challenges with the island's double-currency system (18 percent) as their biggest concern.
- While low salaries and a high cost of living remain the most predominant concerns among all age groups, Cubans between 40 and 59 are most concerned about these economic issues.

Family's Economic Situation Remains the Same from One Year Ago

- Nearly a year after the Cuban government authorized select areas of self-employment, more than three-in-five Cubans (62 percent) say their family situation is the same from one year ago.
- Another three-in-five Cubans (61 percent) believe that their economic situation will stay the same over the next year, while 23 percent believe it will improve and 10 percent believe it will worsen.

Desire for Change

- More than three-in-four Cuban adults desire fundamental political change (76 percent) in the form of a multi-party system, freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Cuban authorities have intensified their efforts to crack down on any individuals seeking to exercise fundamental freedoms. According to the [Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation](#), the average rate of political arrests in the first eight months of 2011 doubled from the rate in 2010.
- Almost nine of 10 citizens (88 percent) support economic change in the form of substantive private property rights. Cuba's economy is one of the world's least free, followed only by Zimbabwe and North Korea according to [The Wall Street Journal and the Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom](#).
- While a majority of every demographic group favor both political and economic change, younger respondents support change in higher numbers with over 83 percent of those 39 and younger supporting change.

Cubans Do Not Believe Substantive Economic Reform Is Possible without Political Change

- Approximately three in five Cuban citizens (59 percent) do not believe that substantial change to their economic system is possible *without* corresponding political reforms. With the National Conference of the Cuban Communist Party scheduled for Jan. 28, 2012 activists and dissidents are demanding that political reforms be discussed.

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Cubans Do Not See Desired Reforms Taking Shape

- When asked whether reforms to the Cuban system discussed by the Cuban government are actually taking shape on the island more than half of respondents said no. Of the 27 percent of respondents who indicated they believe reforms *are* taking shape, two-thirds could not cite a specific measure by name or function.
- When Cubans were asked to cite a reform that would be most beneficial to them - beyond the reforms that have been discussed or promised by the Cuban government - 31 percent cited salaries, while 19 percent cited single currency. Twelve percent of respondents cited an allowance to freely travel abroad.
- Respondants older than the age of 60 are most interested in reforms addressing Cuba's double currency system. Their pensions are paid in Cuban *pesos*, yet many of their essential food and living items are sold in the Cuban *convertible peso*, also known as the CUC, which is currently pegged to the U.S. dollar at a ratio of one-to-one or 25 Cuban *pesos*.

Cubans' Lack of Access to Information Technology

- Cubans' access to information technology is severely limited. A paltry seven percent of Cubans reported having access to the Internet, while only 10 percent reported access to email. These low figures – among closed societies only Zimbabwe and Burma have fewer citizens connected – exist despite expectations to the contrary when Cuba and Venezuela touted a new fibre optic cable in 2010 that promised to expand Cuba's access and connection speeds to the Internet. ([World Bank World Development Indicators 2011](#)).
- Despite Cuba's removal of the prohibition to buy and own a cell phone in 2008, only 22 percent of Cubans report having access to such devices. This figure represents the number of persons who may own or share a mobile phone with friends or family members. Independent researchers estimate Cuba's mobile phone penetration rate - the number of citizens who own phones and have accounts - to be approximately [10 percent](#). Cuba lags far behind other countries in Latin America in terms of cell phone penetration; Haiti has the second-lowest in the region at 35 percent, according to [independent telecommunications research](#).

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