



IRI Cuba Index

The International Republican Institute (IRI) has conducted public opinion survey work in Cuba dating back to 2007. The latest survey was conducted January 20 – February 20, 2013. Among the key findings:

- Repression of free speech and civil liberties remains high. A majority of respondents (69 percent) answered that in the last two years it has not gotten easier to speak one's mind in public without retribution.
- Cuts in government jobs and the lack of private sector opportunities are driving Cubans into the informal/black market economy to survive. Despite government claims that the private sector is expanding, responses suggest that employment in this sector increased by only three percent from last year ([IRI Survey March 2012](#)). In contrast, respondents who claimed to work in the informal sector expanded by nine percent.
- Hesitancy to respond to sensitive, politically-oriented questions persists; 15 percent of respondents refused to answer whether they think Cubans should vote to choose their president, and 20 percent did not answer when asked if, under certain circumstances, the government represses its own people.
- Cubans seem optimistic about economic reforms implemented over the last six years and believe them to be important. However, 64 percent say they are not benefiting from these reforms directly. Those who say they benefit are mostly concentrated in Havana and the western provinces of the island.
- Despite reports of increased access to the Internet on the island and the connection of the island's first fiber optic cable, only four percent of respondents reported having access to both Internet and email.

Findings:

Quality of Life and Economic Situation

- There seems to be a growing disparity between those with means and those in poverty. When respondents were asked their views on quality of life and their family's economic situation, both questions yielded 'very bad' responses compared to 'very good' at a rate of two to one.
- The disparity in the economic situation and quality of life has a regional component. Half of the total respondents who answered that their quality of life was very good came from Havana and the western region of the island. By contrast, more than half of the respondents who answered that their quality of life was very bad were from the eastern region of the island.

(more)

IRI Cuba Index – Page Two

- Despite Cuban government claims that racism is not an issue in Cuba, of respondents who answered that their quality of life was very bad, 60 percent were Afro-Cuban (ethnic breakdown of the survey sample was 55 percent Afro-Cuban to 45 percent White).
- Despite the 50-50 breakdown between male and female respondents, women tended to see their situation as worse. Of all respondents who answered that their quality of life was very good, 64 percent were men compared to 36 percent women. Of all the respondents who answered their quality of life was very bad, 45 percent were men compared to 55 percent who were women.
- Of all respondents who answered that the economic situation of their family was “very bad,” 42 percent were male compared to 58 percent female. Females are more likely to work full-time in the home than males in Cuba and therefore are more involved with the everyday economic situation of their families.
- As shown in previous surveys, it remains the case that remittances from abroad are only received by a small portion of the population, with only 20 percent of respondents reporting that they received remittances. Although small in number, Cubans who receive remittances are six percent more likely to answer that the economic situation of their family is very good and nine percent more likely to answer that it is good, compared to respondents who do not receive remittances.

Economic Reforms and Benefits

- Over the past year, the number of respondents who reported they think their economic situation will improve in the next 12 months increased by 18 percent. However, respondents who reported that their economic situation has improved since last year remained unchanged, while those who say it remained the same increased by eight percent. Thus, while there is increased optimism on their economic outlook, such optimism may be tempered by the economic reality of the past year.
- Compared to last year, there was a 20 percent increase in respondents who answered that they have benefitted from one of the reforms. Still, a majority of 64 percent of respondents say they have not benefitted from any of the reforms, despite the almost six years since some of the reforms were enacted.
- There is a geographic disparity among those who answered that they have benefitted from a reform and those who say they have not. Respondents who live in the central and eastern regions of the island say they are 15 to 20 percent less likely, respectively, to have benefitted from a reform than respondents from the western region of the island and Havana.

(more)

IRI Cuba Index – Page Three

- Access to remittances was found to influence perceptions of benefitting from a reform, as respondents who do not receive remittances are eight percent more likely to answer that they have benefitted from none of the reforms compared to respondents who receive remittances.
- There seems to be a geographical and racial component to those who receive remittances. Eighty-six percent of respondents in the eastern region of the island reported that they do not receive remittances, the highest percentage among all regions. Further, despite the 45-55 breakdown of White to Afro-Cubans in the survey sample, among the respondents who answered that they received remittances, 56 percent were White and 44 percent were Afro-Cuban. It is widely reported that a majority of Cuban families living abroad and likely to send remittances are White.
- Cuba's dual currency system seems to influence how Cubans perceive reforms. Respondents who answered that they do not have access to convertible Cuban Pesos (CUC) in their income are 19 percent more likely to answer that they had not benefitted from a reform compared to respondents who do have access to CUCs. Furthermore, there seems to be unequal distribution of CUCs throughout the island, as 73 percent of respondents who answered that they receive CUCs were from Havana and the western provinces.

Access to Information and Technology

- IRI tracking data showed a spike in the percentage of Cubans who had regular access to a cell phone in 2011, after the ban on cell phone ownership and usage was lifted. However, since that time, the percentages have decreased due to restrictions on ownership and the prohibitive costs of activation and service which is limited to calls and text messaging. The percentage remained approximately the same since IRI's last survey, with only 19 percent of respondents responding that they did have regular access to a cellular phone. This figure includes the number of persons who may own or share a cell phone with friends or family members.
- Cubans still lack viable access to a free flow of information. Only four percent of respondents answered that they have access to email and Internet outside of the government-regulated intranets that are described in the survey as email. Individuals with access only to government-controlled email combined with those who answered they have access to nothing totaled 96 percent who cannot hook up to the Internet.

(more)

IRI Cuba Index – Page Four

Political Attitudes in Cuba

- The amount of short-term detentions over the past year has continued to increase; in 2012 alone, more than 6,000 politically-motivated arrests and short-term detentions were recorded by the Cuban Commission on Human Rights Reconciliation (an independent group on the island). When asked whether respondents thought that the Cuban government represses its own people, the majority said yes. In fact, 69 percent reported that in the last two years it has been no easier for Cubans to speak their minds in public without retribution.
- Cubans continue to desire fundamental political change and the majority of respondents (64 percent) reported that they should have the right to vote in order to decide who should be their president.
- Repression and intimidation from the Cuban government is still a pervasive force in the lives of Cubans. Many respondents were reluctant to answer certain questions they may have deemed sensitive. When asked the question if they thought Cubans should be allowed to vote to decide who should be their president, 15 percent chose not to answer. When asked if the government represses its own people under certain circumstances, 20 percent chose not to answer.

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