



Cuba: Country Dossier

January 2019



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Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

January 2019

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World Watch List 2019

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016	Total Score WWL 2015
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.9	94	94	92	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	93	89	88	81
3	Somalia	16.3	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.4	8.9	91	91	91	87	90
4	Libya	15.3	15.0	15.1	16.0	16.3	9.6	87	86	78	79	76
5	Pakistan	14.3	14.1	13.9	15.0	13.2	16.7	87	86	88	87	79
6	Sudan	14.7	15.0	14.6	15.6	16.1	10.6	87	87	87	84	80
7	Eritrea	14.7	14.9	15.8	16.0	15.2	9.4	86	86	82	89	79
8	Yemen	16.6	16.3	16.4	16.7	16.7	3.1	86	85	85	78	73
9	Iran	14.0	14.3	14.3	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	83	80
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	14.8	13.2	15.2	83	81	73	68	62
11	Syria	13.6	14.0	13.1	13.8	14.2	13.0	82	76	86	87	83
12	Nigeria	12.3	11.8	13.4	12.9	12.9	16.7	80	77	78	78	78
13	Iraq	13.9	14.4	14.1	14.6	13.6	8.1	79	86	86	90	86
14	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.9	16.7	1.1	78	78	76	76	78
15	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.6	14.0	15.3	16.5	2.4	77	79	76	76	77
16	Egypt	11.7	13.2	10.7	13.2	11.0	15.9	76	70	65	64	61
17	Uzbekistan	15.4	12.9	13.9	12.3	15.9	3.1	74	73	71	70	69
18	Myanmar	11.4	11.8	13.3	12.1	11.8	11.1	71	65	62	62	60
19	Laos	13.0	9.1	14.2	14.7	14.9	4.6	71	67	64	58	58
20	Vietnam	12.7	8.2	12.7	13.5	14.2	9.1	70	69	71	66	68
21	Central Africa Republic	10.2	9.7	11.9	10.6	11.1	16.1	70	61	58	59	67
22	Algeria	13.1	14.2	10.1	11.8	12.7	7.6	70	58	58	56	55
23	Turkmenistan	14.6	10.8	13.8	13.3	15.1	1.3	69	68	67	66	63
24	Mali	11.4	10.1	11.5	9.2	9.9	15.4	68	59	59	55	52
25	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	12.2	13.0	13.3	0.6	67	57	55	-	50
26	Turkey	12.4	11.1	10.7	13.2	10.9	7.2	66	62	57	55	52
27	China	10.4	8.0	10.3	11.8	14.5	10.0	65	57	57	57	57
28	Ethiopia	10.0	10.0	10.3	10.8	10.4	13.5	65	62	64	67	61
29	Tajikistan	13.8	11.9	11.6	12.1	12.9	2.4	65	65	58	58	50
30	Indonesia	10.6	11.1	11.3	10.2	9.3	12.0	65	59	55	55	50
31	Jordan	13.0	13.1	11.8	11.5	12.2	3.0	65	66	63	59	56
32	Nepal	12.4	11.4	10.6	10.9	11.9	7.0	64	64	-	-	-
33	Bhutan	12.9	11.1	12.3	12.4	14.0	0.9	64	62	61	56	56
34	Kazakhstan	13.2	10.8	10.3	12.2	13.5	3.1	63	63	56	55	51
35	Morocco	12.2	13.3	9.6	12.0	14.4	1.5	63	51	49	47	47
36	Brunei	13.4	14.3	10.5	10.3	13.4	0.7	63	64	64	61	58
37	Tunisia	12.1	13.2	10.7	11.2	12.0	3.3	63	62	61	58	55
38	Qatar	13.0	12.6	10.3	11.0	14.1	1.1	62	63	66	65	64
39	Mexico	8.3	7.5	12.2	10.2	9.7	13.5	61	59	57	56	55
40	Kenya	11.7	10.6	10.1	8.3	11.5	8.3	61	62	68	68	63
41	Russian Federation	12.5	8.4	10.7	10.4	12.0	5.7	60	51	46	48	45
42	Malaysia	11.8	14.2	12.1	11.7	8.6	1.5	60	65	60	58	55
43	Kuwait	13.2	12.2	10.1	10.5	12.2	1.5	60	61	57	56	49
44	Oman	12.9	12.5	9.8	9.6	12.8	1.7	59	57	53	53	55
45	United Arab Emirates	12.8	12.0	9.1	10.5	12.2	1.9	58	58	55	55	49
46	Sri Lanka	11.0	8.3	10.5	11.5	10.0	7.0	58	57	55	-	51
47	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.8	9.4	8.5	12.6	58	56	53	55	55
48	Bangladesh	11.0	9.1	11.6	10.5	7.8	7.8	58	58	63	57	51
49	Palestinian Territories	11.4	12.3	9.0	10.6	11.8	2.4	57	60	64	62	58
50	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	-	57	50
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.4	56	-	56	56	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	12.7	9.9	10.9	9.2	11.9	1.9	56	-	-	-	-
53	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	57	58	60
54	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	9.3	7.4	10.3	16.1	55	-	-	-	-
55	Bahrain	11.9	12.2	8.6	10.2	10.2	1.5	55	57	54	54	-
56	Cameroon	9.9	7.3	10.0	7.8	7.5	11.3	54	-	-	-	-
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.8	4.8	52	-	59	57	56
58	Niger	11.5	9.7	8.1	8.1	10.0	4.8	52	-	-	53	-
59	Cuba	8.8	4.4	9.1	10.5	11.8	3.9	49	-	-	-	-
60	Chad	11.5	8.2	9.0	8.0	8.7	3.0	48	-	-	-	-
61	Burkina Faso	9.0	8.0	8.8	6.6	7.9	7.2	48	-	-	-	-
62	Uganda	11.4	8.0	7.7	6.9	9.6	3.7	47	-	-	-	-
63	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.0	46	-	-	-	-
64	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.5	5.8	8.0	15.0	44	-	-	-	-
65	Mozambique	6.7	4.3	6.0	6.9	6.0	13.3	43	-	-	-	-
66	Gambia	7.7	8.2	8.2	8.3	8.8	1.9	43	-	-	-	-
67	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.7	8.2	5.5	6.4	4.3	43	-	-	-	-
68	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	3.3	43	-	-	-	-
69	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.1	8.7	10.4	6.1	42	-	-	-	-
70	Togo	8.8	6.7	8.5	7.1	8.4	2.0	42	-	-	-	-
71	Venezuela	3.3	3.8	10.5	9.0	8.8	5.9	41	-	-	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	6.7	41	-	-	-	-
73	Nicaragua	2.3	3.6	6.4	8.9	7.9	11.9	41	-	-	-	-

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Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Further news and analysis is supplied by World Watch Monitor and WWR staff.

World Watch List Cuba	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	49	59
WWL 2018	-	-
WWL 2017	-	-
WWL 2016	-	-
WWL 2015	-	-

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.

Please note: The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Cuba

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19583447>

Recent country history

The Cuban government chose a new head of state in 2018, ending six decades of rule by the Castro family. Raul Castro, who took over the presidency from February 2008 until April 2018, handed over [power](#) to Miguel Diaz-Canel, who was the former vice-president of Cuba. This move gives a clear line of [continuity](#) to the party's socialist regime and its "zero tolerance and repression" towards dissent.

Another aspect to be highlighted is the on-and-off relationship with the USA in recent years. US-President Obama started a [campaign](#) in 2015 to restore diplomatic relations with Cuba, including its removal from an official blacklist of terrorist sponsors, the opening of embassies and the easing of various restrictions. However, at the end of Obama's presidential term in January 2017, successor Donald Trump threatened to jeopardize this process through new [restrictive policies and maintaining commercial, economic and financial embargos](#) (See below under "The political landscape").

The religious landscape

Christianity is often seen as a threat to a Communist government, since its core principles contradict totalitarian and repressive measures. Hence, religious freedom is limited, especially when Christians challenge the ruling party by [speaking up](#) and questioning the government's ideology. For this reason, Christians become targets for the regime, together with their families and closer friends. By denouncing Communist party measures, church leaders in Cuba have suffered threats, slander, arrest and confiscation of religious materials and other property. They have no chance of recourse since authorities at all levels remain loyal to the Communist Party.

Another unique characteristic of the regime is the virtual [deification](#) of the revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro. This hero-worship is used to root Communist values into the hearts and minds of its citizens through indoctrinating the youth. At the same time, modern ideologies have been introduced that reject Christian values, e.g. the new gender ideology. The LGBTI agenda has been given government support and same-sex marriage is likely to become legal if the constitutional [re-definition of marriage](#) is accepted. Meanwhile, Mariela Castro (daughter of Raul Castro) is head of the National Center for Sex Education and is actively promoting the idea of "LGBTI churches" and has endorsed various other LGBTI initiatives.

Finally, the [Santeria](#) religion particularly prevalent in Cuba, influences both the social and political sphere. Unlike Christian activities, Santeria is officially welcome and is regarded as being part of Cuban culture. No violent incidents against Christians by this group have been reported.

The political landscape

The appointment of the new president, Miguel Diaz-Canel, is significant but - as mentioned above - will not mean a new style of rule. He is [loyal](#) to the regime and repressive policies will [continue](#). Raul Castro [remains](#) First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba and everything indicates they work together to keep the interests of the Party upheld. A Constitutional reform is in progress but this is unlikely to show any real change towards democracy.

The progress made by former US President Barack Obama to improve the relationship between the USA and Cuba faced a serious setback when President Donald Trump announced a series of measures in 2017 and 2018. These included [travel and trade restrictions](#), [staff cuts](#) at the US embassy in Havana, the [eviction](#) of staff from Cuba's embassy in Washington and [voting against the UN resolution](#) condemning the US embargo on Cuba, among others

It is also worth noting that the support given to [Venezuela](#) and [Nicaragua](#) by Cuba has helped to further isolate Cuba from the American continent.

The socio-economic landscape

One of the greatest problems for the Cuban economy is its centralization. The Cuban government decides what can be produced and at what price it should be sold. The few private entrepreneurs that exist cannot accumulate wealth or grow as this would make them potentially dangerous to the government. Since Cuba is not a member of the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, it is difficult to know the country's economic situation accurately. In his first speech as president in July 2018, Diaz Canel said that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country had [risen by a modest 1.1%](#). The Ministry of Industries reported that [production was not reaching targets](#), making the payment of [external debt](#) harder. Also, citizens are still having to cope with the damage left behind by Hurricane Irma in September 2017. There is also a serious reduction in trade caused by the United States embargo, not to mention other [sanctions imposed due to Cuba's support for Venezuela](#).

Violations of human rights continue: The number of [arbitrary arrests](#) increased, as did the [censorship of independent journalists](#). There are also travel restrictions preventing citizens from leaving the island on the grounds of "defense and national security" or "other reasons of public interest". This situation impacts Christians whenever they make a stand against government action.

Concluding remarks

Cuba, like any socialist country, exerts totalitarian control over its citizens and their individual rights and it seems that this situation is not going to change despite there being a new head of state. While it is true that there have been some positive developments, the control over all opposition and the lack of recognition of fundamental human rights are in practice the same. Many Cubans seek to leave the island in order to find a better future elsewhere, and this drain of manpower weakens society, helping government manipulation and totalitarianism retain the upper hand in the country. Christians seek an active role in strengthening Cuban society, even though their work cannot be overtly political due to possible reprisals.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Cuba

1. Recent country history: power - https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/04/19/actualidad/1524144469_523137.html
2. Recent country history: continuity - https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/04/01/america/1522610507_166121.html
3. Recent country history: campaign - <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/us-cuba-relations>
4. Recent country history: restrictive policies and maintaining commercial, economic and financial embargos - <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44822.pdf>

5. The religious landscape: speaking up - <https://www.martinoticias.com/a/sacerdotes-cubanos-escriben-a-castro/160976.html>
6. The religious landscape: deification - <http://www.noticiacristiana.com/sociedad/iglesiaestado/2017/01/cubanos-rinden-culto-fidel-castro.html>
7. The religious landscape: re-definition of marriage - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/23/cubas-new-constitution-paves-way-for-same-sex-marriage>
8. The religious landscape: Santeria - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santer%C3%ADa>
9. The political landscape: loyal - <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/04/19/cuba-president-raul-castro-miguel-diaz-canel/530101002/>
10. The political landscape: continue - https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/04/01/america/1522610507_166121.html
11. The political landscape: remains - <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-43832895>
12. The political landscape: travel and trade restrictions - <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/11/08/trump-cracks-down-u-s-business-and-travel-cuba/843419001/>
13. The political landscape: staff cuts - <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/03/02/u-s-makes-staff-cuts-embassy-cuba-permanent/389532002/>
14. The political landscape: eviction - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/03/us-orders-cuban-diplomats-leave-washington-embassy-sonic-attacks>
15. The political landscape: voting against the UN resolution - <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/01/world/americas/cuba-un-us-embargo.html>
16. The political landscape: Venezuela - <http://www.periodico26.cu/index.php/en/cuba-news/item/8578-cuba-supports-venezuela-against-economic-attack-and-military-threat>
17. The political landscape: Nicaragua - <http://www.radioangulo.cu/en/cuba/23426-cuba-reaffirms-its-unwavering-solidarity-and-support-for-nicaragua>
18. The socio-economic landscape: risen by a modest 1.1% - <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2018/07/25/la-economia-de-cuba-no-sale-del-letargo-crecio-un-discreto-11-en-el-primer-semester/>
19. The socio-economic landscape: production was not reaching targets - <https://www.cubnet.org/destacados/ha-avanzado-la-economia-cubana-este-2018/>
20. The socio-economic landscape: external debt - <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article131088484.html>

21. The socio-economic landscape: sanctions imposed due to Cuba's support for Venezuela - <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Pages/cuba.aspx>
22. The socio-economic landscape: arbitrary arrests - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/cuba>
23. The socio-economic landscape: censorship of independent journalists - <https://www.martinoticias.com/a/cuba-raul-castro-depredador-libertad-prensa-informe-reporteros-sin-fronteras/161534.html>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
11,489,000	7,038,000	61.3

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

How did Christians get there?

Christianity became established in Cuba in 1512 through Roman Catholic priests of the Dominican order; this was a consequence of Spanish colonization. The earliest Protestant activity dates back to 1741 when Cuba was under British occupation. Through the massive influx of slaves from Africa a syncretistic cult called [Santería](#) developed around 1800 mixing elements of Roman Catholic faith with Yoruba customs. After gaining independence from Spain in 1898, Cuba's dependency on the United States [facilitated](#) the establishment of many Protestant churches and movements including Methodists, Adventists, Presbyterians, Quakers, Baptists and Lutherans. [Spiritism](#) was also introduced at that time.

What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Cuba	Christians	%
Orthodox	43,000	0.6
Catholic	6,113,000	86.9
Protestant	300,000	4.3
Independent	409,000	5.8
Unaffiliated	174,000	2.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	7,039,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	273,000	3.9
Renewalist movement	1,085,000	15.4

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. Roman Catholics: All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. Protestants: Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. Independents: Believers who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). Unaffiliated Christians: Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. Doubly-affiliated Christians: Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. Evangelical movement: Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. Renewalist movement: Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

The number of Christians in Cuba is not as high as in other countries in the region. But with Christians making up 61.3% of the population, Christianity still dominates the religious scene in the country, which has a Catholic majority (86.9%). Observers state that the presence of Evangelicals in the country is increasing. In addition, there is a significant number of citizens who practice [Santería](#), although there is no official data on numbers. A [Pew Research 2015 report](#) estimates that by 2050 the Christian community will decrease to 57.8%.

Religious context

Religious Context: Cuba	Numbers	%
Christians	7,038,000	61.3
Muslim	9,400	0.1
Hindu	23,700	0.2
Buddhist	6,200	0.1
Ethnoreligionist	0	0.0
Jewish	840	0.0
Bahai	1,200	0.0
Atheist	469,000	4.1
Agnostic	1,977,000	17.2
Other	1,963,620	17.1

OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

Minority religious groups in Cuba are dominated by the Spiritist community. It is also important to note that an estimated 21.3% of the population identify themselves as agnostic/atheist and strong secular tendencies are continuing to emerge. In daily life, the Cuban people do not particularly emphasize their Catholic or Protestant faith.

Notes on the current situation

- The State tolerates church-based social projects but opposes criticism of any kind. Although it offers a slightly greater recognition to the Roman Catholic Church because of its history in the country, this does not mean it is exempt from persecution when it criticizes the government, provides foreign powers with information about the situation in the country or when advocating human rights and religious freedom.
- Representatives and members of Christian associations are often monitored and targeted by the government – along with their families, especially religious leaders and members of unregistered churches. The regime commonly imprisons them, puts pressure on their employers to fire them, or demands the expulsion of dissidents from universities. The regime uses all sorts of measures to intimidate them and make them abandon their cause and their faith-based opinions.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

1. How did Christians get there?: Santeria - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santería>
2. How did Christians get there?: facilitated - <http://revistas.usal.es/index.php/1130-2887/article/viewFile/9941/10309>
3. How did Christians get there?: Spiritism - <http://www.cuban-traditions.com/religions/afrocuban/spiritism/spiritism.html>
4. What church networks exist today?: Santeria - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/santeria/>
5. What church networks exist today?: Pew Research 2015 report - http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/03/PF_15.04.02_ProjectionsFullReport.pdf

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018 Cuba scored 49 points in WWL 2019 and, as in WWL 2018, remained a Persecution Watch Country.

What type of persecution dominates?

- **Dictatorial paranoia:** The government's intention to remain in power has led to widespread repression and the infringement of citizens' rights. All dissidents suffer relentless harassment and are classed as enemies of the regime. Impunity and corruption at all levels of government contribute to this situation. Christians can be targeted with no recourse to justice since loyalty to the Party dominates society.
- **Communist and post-Communist oppression:** Cuba is ruled according to Communist values - which are taught in schools from an early age - and bans opposing world views. The regime has been actively promoting a LGBTI agenda, which opposes conservative Christian values. The Communist-based government seeks to control all norms and the running of every state institution.

Who is driving persecution?

Cuba is a Communist dictatorship; the government and its supporters try to exert control over both the private and public life of citizens. Any sign of disagreement with the regime by Christians or others will be investigated and dealt with harshly. On the other hand, recently, LGBTI pressure groups in government circles have been [actively distorting](#) the content of Christian faith in society.

What it results in

All religious denominations are affected by government control. A significant number of Christians have been arrested for attending unregistered meetings or expressing disagreement with the regime, children has been indoctrinated and religious materials have been confiscated. Some Christians considered to be opponents of the regime have been removed from their jobs. In addition, secularist ideology has become more influential through support by the Cuban Council of Churches and the imposition of LGTBI content in the educational field.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

Cuba	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	1	34	5	1
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	104	124	1	1

Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage

to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- February 2018, Villa Clara: The regional coordinator of the Patmos Institute, an independent civil society organization that promotes inter-religious dialogue and freedom of religion, was [arrested](#) by the state authorities.
- November 2017, Habana: A Christian rights activist (also a member of the Orlando Zapata Tamayo Civic Resistance Front) was arrested by state security agents. His home was also [raided](#) and two Bibles and other Christian material were confiscated.

External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

1. Who is driving persecution?: actively distorting - <https://www.rt.com/viral/387488-cuba-transgender-clergyman-mass/>
2. Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: arrested - http://evangelicalfocus.com/world/3336/Activists_denounce_the_upsurge_of_religious_persecution_in_Cuba
3. Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: raided - <https://www.christianpost.com/news/cuban-christian-man-jailed-police-confiscate-bibles-told-our-god-is-fidel-castro-215136/>

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

In the WWL 2019 reporting period, Cuba scored 49 points and thus remains a Persecution Watch Countries, as in WWL 2018. The change in government leadership and the constitutional reform caused a minimal decrease in pressure; however, the score for violence rose by over 1 point.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Cuba	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Very weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Strong
Secular intolerance	SI	Weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Weak

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology (long version).

Communist and post-Communist oppression (Strong):

After the Cuban revolution (1953-1958), the country was structured as a Communist state. Due to a gradual [opening up](#) to the world market in 2015, the regime's main socialist basis has become less influential, causing the State's original policies to be more or less abandoned. Nonetheless, the country is still ruled according to Communist postulates and anyone not adhering to the core values of the ruling party is targeted and repressed. Since religion does not play any key role in society - more than anything due to the idolization of Fidel Castro and the Party - the government welcomes ideologies that counter Christian values even in the private sphere, such as the LGBTI ideology. A new Constitution is being drafted and even though church leaders have been called to participate in the process of reform, it is still uncertain if their voices will be heard. In any case, the framework of the new Constitution preserves the continuity of a repressive regime.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

The Communist Party is the only constitutionally recognized party. Anyone questioning the leaders and their powers - whether for reasons of faith or otherwise - is labeled an enemy of the regime and will be opposed. The result is that Christians are forced to act against their beliefs not only to avoid being targeted by the regime but also to gain access to basic services. While the government's repressive behavior is currently not as violent as in past years, government opposition to dissident Christians remains intense. Corruption and impunity are rampant. The government controls the state apparatus at all levels and there is no independent authority to ensure respect for the rule of law. Christians have almost no space to express themselves freely without fear of reprisals.

Unregistered churches run a greater risk, since they have to conduct their evangelizing work underground, with the constant fear of being discovered and punished.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: Cuba	IO	RN	EA	DPR	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	-	-	-	VERY WEAK	STRONG	WEAK	MEDIUM	WEAK
Government officials	-	-	-	Very weak	Very strong	Medium	Strong	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Very weak	-	Very weak	Weak	-
Violent religious groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	Medium	Weak	Weak	Very weak
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	-	-	-	-	Medium	Very weak	-	Weak
One's own (extended) family	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	Weak	Very weak
Political parties	-	-	-	-	Strong	Weak	Medium	Weak
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology (long version).

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

Despite the change of leadership, state institutions still control citizens' public and private life through government officials and the ruling Communist Party. Christian life is monitored by the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA) which seeks to control and restrict every religious activity on the island, including church activities. It is also the task of Communist Party sympathizers to inform the authorities if they become aware of citizens acting "against the postulates of the regime".

Drivers of Communist and post-Communist oppression:

Both government officials and members of the Communist Party represent a single force aiming to maintain Communist values in the country. State education is mandatory and is used for encouraging loyalty to the Party. Through the indoctrination of children and youth and the idolization of Fidel Castro in schools, the rights of Christian parents to educate their children according to their religious convictions are not recognized. Christians expressing views contrary to Communist ideals are treated by the authorities as "traitors".

Context

Cuba is one of the few remaining Communist regimes in the world. It is still unknown if the new leader, Miguel Diaz-Canel, will continue to isolate Cuba or seek to improve international relationships. Although progress had been made by former US-President Barack Obama in improving the relationship between the USA and Cuba, the current president, Donald Trump, announced a series of measures in 2017-2018 that represented a great setback and has affected the lives of ordinary Cuban citizens.

Although all states should act as the main guarantor of human rights, Cuba neither protects these rights nor reacts with counter-measures when they are violated. Thus, corruption prevails and perpetrators are left unpunished. This affects Christians too, since there is no possibility of appealing against the restrictions placed on church activities, parental rights and day-to-day discrimination. By promoting other ideologies and rites (e.g. LGBTI and Santeria), the State would seem to be bent on eradicating Christian values from Cubans' daily lives. However, intolerance and repression affect anyone who is considered an opponent or a possible threat to the regime. It is also worth considering that the non-traditional churches, those which recently emerged in the country, struggle the most since they have few chances of register and conduct their religious activities legally. So, they are permanent targets of the government officials and the ruling party.

Christian communities and how they are affected

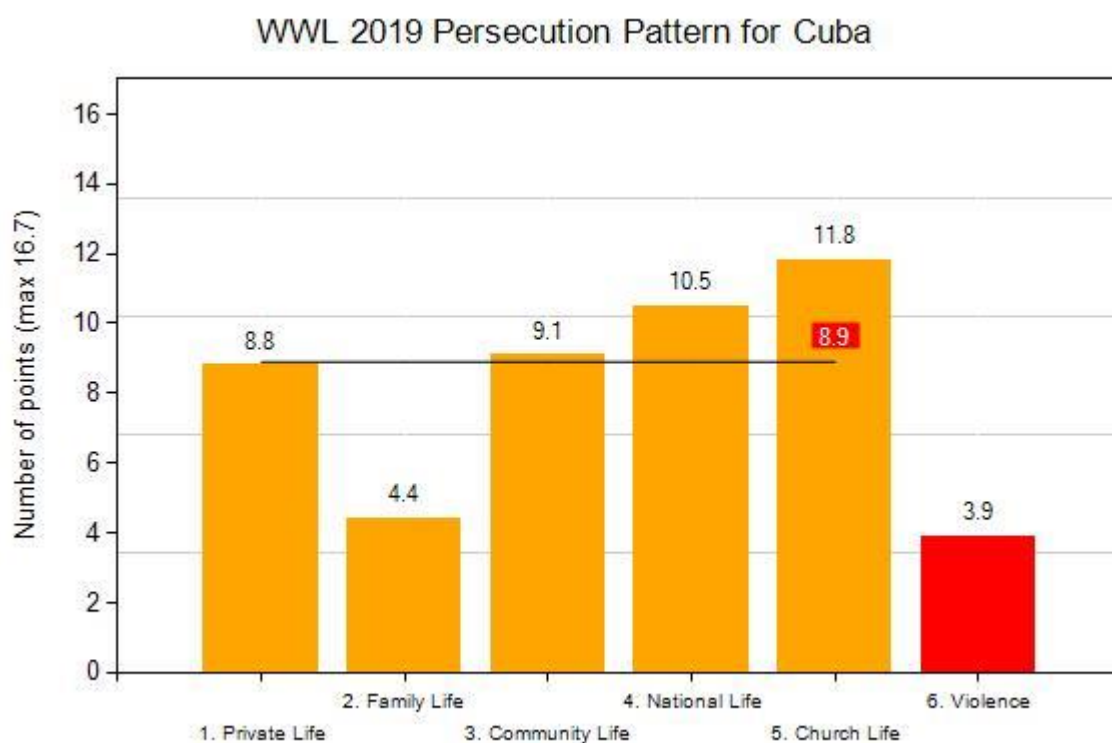
Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not isolated from interaction with other Christians in Cuba and so are not treated as a separate category in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: These are mainly Roman Catholic churches, but there is a small Orthodox and a growing Protestant community too. These churches are monitored and suffer state opposition if content opposing Communist ideology is discovered. They may also be criticized by leaders of politicized churches, regime sympathizers and ideological pressure groups.

Converts: This category includes cross-denominational converts from one church to another, converts from Santeria or the Communist Party. Converts are often rejected by members of society and subjected to reprisals.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category is made up of Pentecostal and Evangelical groups. As well as facing the same challenges as Historical Christian communities, it is almost impossible for these church groups to be registered. Most of the time they are therefore forced to act outside the law, gathering secretly in house-churches and living in constant fear of being discovered by the regime and party militants.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Cuba shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Cuba fell from 9.3 in WWL 2018 to 8.9 in WWL 2019.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Church sphere* (11.8), *National sphere* (10.5) and *Community sphere* (9.1) reflecting the high levels of pressure exerted by the Cuban government and its supporters targeting church activities and Christians who could represent a threat to the regime.
- The score for violence in WWL 2019 was 3.9 points, a rise from 2.4 points in WWL 2018. This increase was caused mainly by a higher number of churches being closed by the government.

Private sphere:

Christians can live their faith in private as long this does not involve opposition to the regime. Former Party members who convert to Christianity will be monitored, including their use of social media. Christian can also be targeted for downloading any Christian material from the internet which contradicts Communist Party values. Bibles and other Christian material and symbols can be used, but are likely to be [confiscated](#) from the homes of human rights activists. Since freedom of assembly is restricted, meeting with other Christians - even if not for religious purposes - may be reported to the authorities, especially if it is known that they are members of unregistered churches.

Family sphere:

Unlike in other countries in the region, parents are not allowed to choose the education they want for their children and homeschooling is forbidden. This is particularly difficult for Christian families since state education in Cuba is based on the Marxist ideology. Since the Penal Code lists punishment for anyone who "causes a child to leave home, to absent himself from school or to reject the national education curriculum", parents cannot teach their children according to their faith without

government action being taken against them. Similarly, if parents raise complaints or question particular teachings at school, their homes are likely to be attacked and risk being [cut off from basic services](#). The fear is so high that parents warn their children not to say anything about their Christian faith.

Those who stand up for victims of political imprisonment (e.g. The Ladies in White group) are also harassed by the government when they denounce the mistreatment and unjust imprisonment of a family member. In such cases, spouses are separated from each other and from their children by force.

Community sphere:

Affiliation to the Communist Party is virtually mandatory in order to have access to basic services. [Committees for the Defense of the Revolution](#) (CDR) are groups formed by sympathizers of the regime to monitor the activities of dissidents, including Christians, since the respect of human rights is considered to be a “subversive” idea. Members of unregistered churches suffer in particular. It is common practice for the regime to hinder Christian students from continuing their university education to prevent them from spreading any anti-Communist influence. Christians also suffer at their workplaces; some have been [fired](#) for allegedly “not being reliable” or for being “counter-revolutionaries”.

National sphere:

The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination based on religion; however, it also states that the Communist Party is “the superior leading force of society and State” and that no freedom can be exercised contrary to the “objectives of the socialist state”. Any law breached due to religious convictions will be punished. Considering that there is no right to conscientious objection, Christian citizens must meet the government's demands without exception or risk harassment, arrest and fines. Oppressive measures are taken against Christian dissidents, such as smear campaigns, the limiting of exit visas and extreme levels of bureaucracy. Christian political parties are not allowed and faith-based organizations are suppressed.

Church sphere:

The legal recognition of a church is in charge of The Ministry of Justice; registration is denied if another local group has identical or similar objectives, or if the applicant’s activities could harm the common good (i.e. oppose Communist party ideology). Church groups failing to register face penalties ranging from fines to closure and include the harassment of both church leaders and members. Further, the government and the Communist Party monitor religious groups through the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA) and control most aspects of religious life. In general, church activities are constantly monitored, with government informants present in most church services. Unregistered churches suffer most and are forced to meet in unofficial house-churches, running the risk of fines and arrest. Youth-work is also restricted and must avoid topics to do with democracy and justice, the protection of human rights. Due to the total state-control of the media, no Christian teaching can be broadcast, the importing and printing of Christian literature is restricted and theological seminaries have been forced to operate without accreditation. Despite such serious limitations, the Roman Catholic Church had the opportunity (in the context of the drafting of the new Constitution) to express concern regarding the issue of same-sex marriage. Most of the time, Cuban Catholic leaders do not attack government policies in order to safeguard institutional dialogue and act as a mediator.

Violence:

In the WWL 2019 reporting period, there were incidents of harassment and arbitrary detentions for Christians who opposed the regime. Examples are the continual arrest of Ladies in White, [preventing](#) them from attending church services and the case of Misael Díaz Pasero, an opposition activist, whose Christian faith was discovered by the police when they raided his home. He has been in prison since November 2017, serving a term of 42 months. During his imprisonment, he has been denied access to a Bible and visits from church leaders. For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

Gender specific persecution

Female: Abortion has been legal and free for a long time and is presented as being a normal contraceptive method. Abortions are obligatory in the case of genetic malformation, in line with the Cuban government's ideal of maintaining a 0% rate of births with deformities. This is a major challenge for Christian wishing to remain loyal to their Christian beliefs. Refusal may be regarded as an act of opposition towards the government. Further, in order to survive, prostitution is common, with all the consequences that this implies, including sexual abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.

Male: National service is compulsory for men. If it is discovered that they are active Christians or have Christian parents, the level of persecution depends on the attitude of commanding officer. Although alternative forms of communal service are theoretically possible, in practice permission is rarely granted. Also, given the economic difficulties resulting from State policies and US sanctions, many men must work abroad in order to meet family needs. Christian men are generally more likely to be arrested or to be harassed since they are more likely to criticize government behavior based on their Christian faith.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to WCD 2018 data, minorities such as Muslims, Hindus, Bahai and Jews exist in Cuba but all groups are well under 1% of the population. According to the US State Department's [International Freedom Report for 2017](#), these religious minorities are unlikely to receive fair treatment from the regime, with the Jehovah's Witnesses being targeted particularly frequently.

Examples: Jehovah's Witnesses find the requirements for university admission incompatible with the group's beliefs which prohibit them from political involvement. They are also banned from professional careers in the field of law and medicine. Also, [according to CSW](#), some groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses had their registration arbitrarily rescinded in the 1970s and have not been able to re-register, thus making them technically illegal.

Future outlook

The political outlook: Authoritarianism, state corruption and poverty are also likely to increase as the current US administration has chosen to close its doors on Cuba. Ordinary citizens will suffer the most, especially those considered dissidents or enemies of the regime. Combined with the media censorship, this will make it even harder for violations of human rights on the island to be made public.

The outlook for Christians - viewed through the lens of:

- **Dictatorial Paranoia:** Churches and Christian activities will continue to be monitored as long as the Communist party holds power. Although freedom for the exercise of religion has improved in some respects in recent years (e.g. conversion is no longer prohibited, the circulation of religious materials is permitted under special circumstances and, despite threats, the confiscation of church buildings has not been carried out), many restrictions will continue to restrict the life of the Church.
- **Communist and post-Communist oppression:** The Communist government's control is well established and its values have influenced the culture of Cuban society. Christian education is out of the question. This will continue to be a particularly difficult challenge for Christian families since they will have to find ways of passing on their faith and values to their children without being imprisoned or separated from them. Another aspect to bear in mind is the increasing secularism. The rejection of Christian values in the public and private sphere could increase, especially since the government is considering modifications to the law which will give LGBTI ideology more influence.

Conclusion: It seems that the new Cuban president will not be bringing any changes to Cuban life in the short term. As a loyal supporter of the previous presidents and the Communist Party, it is hardly likely that he will introduce democratic measures or a return to the rule of law. However, Christian leaders and communities will continue their Christian ministry as they have done in the past, despite all hurdles.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

1. Persecution engines: opening up - <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/25/world/americas/as-cuba-shifts-toward-capitalism-inequality-grows-more-visible.html>
2. Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: confiscated - <https://www.christianpost.com/news/cuban-christian-man-jailed-police-confiscate-bibles-told-our-god-is-fidel-castro-215136/>
3. Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: cut off from basic services - <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2018-04-28-u1-e192519-s27061-opositores-cubanos-denuncian-ataque-su-casa-excrementos>
4. Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: Committees for the Defense of the Revolution - <https://www.libertaddigital.com/opinion/carlos-alberto-montaner/muere-fidel-castro-cuba-anatomia-terror-80713/>
5. Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: fired - https://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/CCDHRN-denuncia-despojo-trabajo-activistas_0_2375762407.html
6. Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: preventing - http://www.diariodecuba.com/derechos-humanos/1517785428_37151.html
7. Persecution of other religious minorities: International Freedom Report for 2017 - <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281308.pdf>

8. Persecution of other religious minorities: according to CSW -
<https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/07/15/prayer/4022/article.htm>

Additional Reports and Articles

WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

Open Doors article(s) from the region

A selection of articles is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

Use the country search function at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

Recent country developments

Use the country search function at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/> (password: freedom).