



# Between Reforms and Repression, Can Cuba's New Forces of Change Succeed?

Ted A. Henken, Armando Chaguaceda | Tuesday, May 10, 2016

Expectations for change in Cuba grew following the historic thaw in U.S.-Cuban relations that began in December 2014, and gained momentum with U.S. President Barack Obama's equally historic [visit to the island](#)

(<http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/18251/down-havana-way-the-promise-of-obama-s-cuba-visit>) in March 2016. How have these epoch-making transformations altered Cuba's newly dynamic domestic reality, which is often inaccurately assumed to be both monolithic and monochromatic?

On one hand, Havana has responded by circling the wagons of the state and doubling down on political centralization under President Raul Castro and los historicos, as the old-guard revolutionaries are known. On the other, a variety of actors in Cuban society—including political dissidents, independent digital journalists and the island's innovative entrepreneurs—have staked increasingly bold claims to the public spaces that have emerged in recent years as a result of Havana's limited economic reforms.

Those concerned with U.S.-Cuban relations at the formal, state-to-state level would do well to watch these emergent actors, activists and entrepreneurs as well. How they push for, respond to and take advantage of changes from above will have a major impact on the pace and direction of future change on the island.

## Government, Opposition and Civil Society

As was clearly demonstrated by its repressive actions, including a record-breaking number of detentions of dissidents in the days and hours leading up to Obama's visit to the island, the Cuban



*Government supporters stage a counter-protest to one held by Ladies in White, Havana, Cuba, March 20, 2016 (AP photo by Rebecca Blackwell).*

regime continues to **fiercely defend a single legal political party** (<http://translatingcuba.com/the-cuban-regime-classifies-the-opponents-are-mercenaries-14ymedio/>), the Cuban Communist Party (CCP), while treating all dissidents as illegitimate at best, and anti-Cuban “mercenaries” at worst. Thus, while all civil liberties and political rights are severely limited, this is especially the case for freedom of association and the right to express grievances, which are only guaranteed within the context of a constitutionally “irrevocable” socialist state.

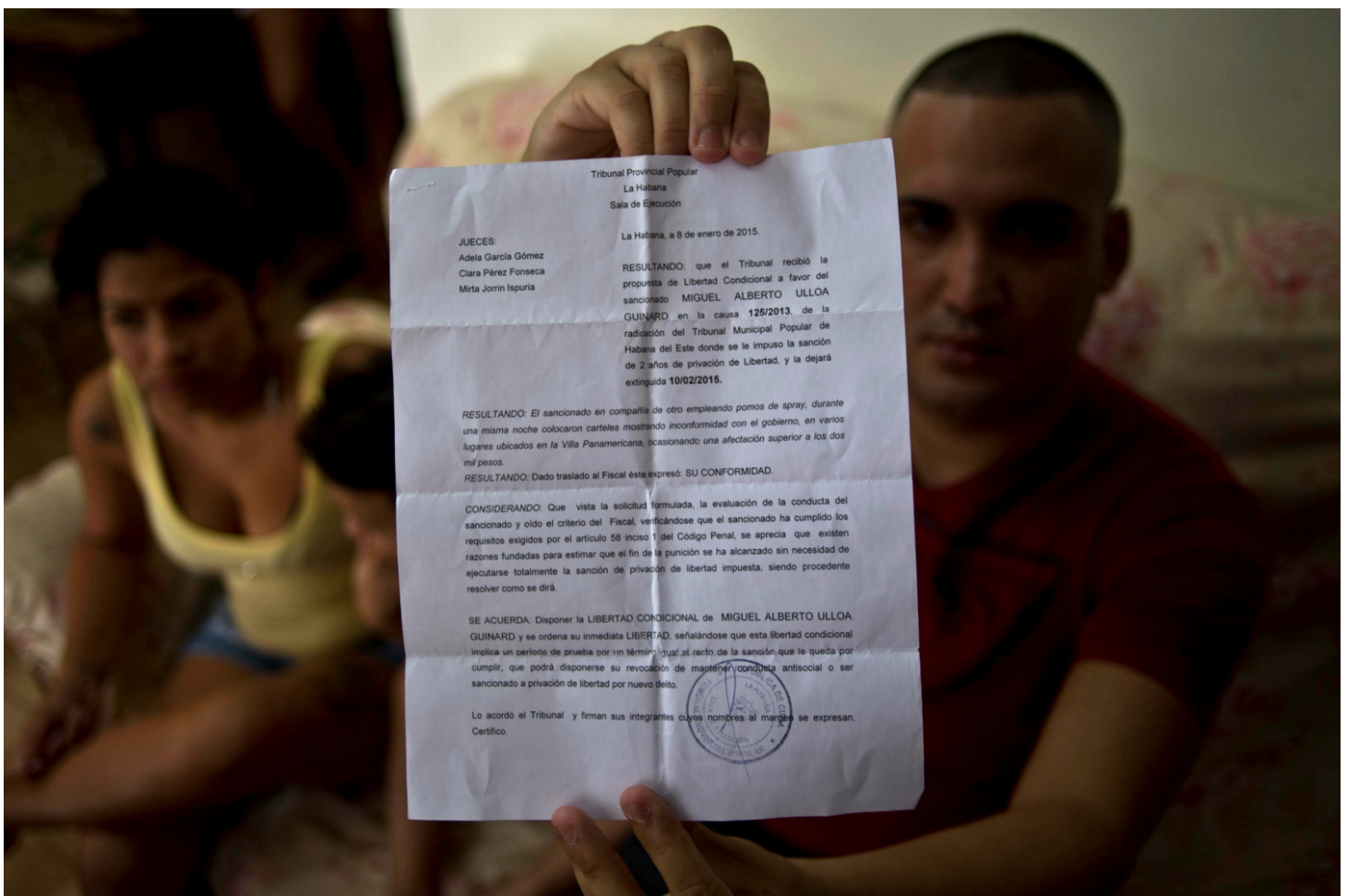
If anyone missed this message during Obama's trip, an aggressive article published a week after the visit by none other than Fidel Castro, which was mockingly entitled “Brother Obama,” should have dispelled any illusions. The article dismissed the U.S. president's “honeyed words,” advised him to stay out of Cuban politics, and **proudly declared** (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/28/we-dont-need-presents-from-the-empire-furious-fidel-castro-says/>), “We don't need the empire to give us any gifts.”

For his part, in his opening speech at the Seventh Party Congress on April 17, 2016, Raul Castro echoed his older brother's unmistakable pushback against Obama's soft-power charm offensive. Raul defended Cuba's single-party system, **accusing Washington** (<http://en.granma.cu/cuba/2016-04-18/the-development-of-the-national-economy-along-with-the-struggle-for-peace-and-our-ideological-resolve-constitute-the-partys-principal-missions>) of seeking “to divide us into several parties in the name of sacrosanct bourgeois democracy,” and continuing to say, “If they manage some day to fragment us, it would be the beginning of the end in our homeland, of the Revolution, socialism and national independence.”

Castro also warned party cadres to be especially alert to the new U.S. engagement approach aimed at “empowering” the island's nascent entrepreneurial sector, since it signals only a change of means. The ends, he argued, remain “to generate agents of change to put an end to the Revolution.” Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez went further in his own speech at the party congress, **categorically dismissing Obama's visit** (<http://www.reuters.com/article/cuba-usa-idUSL2N17L12R>) as a “deep attack on our ideas, our history, our culture and our symbols.”

Still, ahead of the congress, many Cuban citizens and outside observers had hoped that the thaw in U.S.-Cuban relations would allow the Cuban government the space and confidence to enact a number of much-demanded internal economic and political adjustments. Almost no one expected Havana to embrace U.S.-style capitalism or cede its control of the fundamental elements of the island's economy to the private sector. But many did anticipate that the government would respond to the anemic economic growth seen in recent years by doubling down on Raul Castro's initial economic reforms, in particular by deepening and speeding up changes in the microenterprise sector.

Specifically, island reformers inside the party—such as the Afro-Cuban intellectual [Esteban Morales](http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/cuba-es/article70907042.html) (<http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/cuba-es/article70907042.html>) and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights activist and blogger [Francisco Rodriguez](http://bigstory.ap.org/article/c2c101105baf43ff90e4f0ed88b3bd1a/unusual-dissent-erupts-inside-cuban-communist-party) (<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/c2c101105baf43ff90e4f0ed88b3bd1a/unusual-dissent-erupts-inside-cuban-communist-party>)—had expected a wide discussion about the role of private property at the congress, accompanied by measures to give legal business status to some microenterprises; allow some professionals to enter the private sector; facilitate access to wholesale inputs, imports and exports for the nonstate sector; and even permit some Cubans to be directly employed by foreign companies. They were bitterly disappointed.



*Dissident Miguel Alberto Ulloa holding his prison release document, Havana, Cuba, Jan. 9, 2015 (AP photo by Ramon Espinosa).*

Likewise, no one thought the congress would announce multiparty elections, amnesty for political prisoners, or legal recognition of the political opposition or independent press. Many, however, did expect the party to use the gathering to honorably retire a host of trusted but octogenarian

historicos, ushering in a generational succession that would formally place the party in the hands of a younger cadre of 50-something leaders. However, Castro's re-election to a new five-year term as party chief and the reaffirmation of his long-time aides-de-camp, Jose Ramon Machado Ventura and Ramiro Valdes, as members of the island's all-powerful Politburo signaled that generational succession is not yet in the cards.

## What Has Changed?

If Raul Castro's reforms have not altered the essentially Marxist-Leninist character of the regime, with all formal political opposition outlawed and civil liberties severely limited, what has changed? For one thing, while the government under Raul is not necessarily less repressive than it was under Fidel, it uses different methods of repression. So, on the one hand, the number of political prisoners has fallen to historic lows: Of a prison population estimated at 70,000, there **are perhaps between 77 and 93 recognized political prisoners today** (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2003/cuba>), compared to hundreds and even **tens of thousands under Fidel** (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1989/07/20/cubas-prisoners/>). In this regard, the Catholic Church—under the leadership of the recently retired Cardinal Jaime Ortega, himself a former prisoner in the infamous “UMAP” work camps during the late 1960s—has **played an important if controversial role** ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-broadcaster-calls-cuban-cardinal-a-castro-lackey/2012/05/05/gIQA0PtX4T\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-broadcaster-calls-cuban-cardinal-a-castro-lackey/2012/05/05/gIQA0PtX4T_story.html)) as an interlocutor with the government, **winning the release of scores of political prisoners** ([http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/27/world/americas/cardinal-jaime-ortega-y-alamino-catholic-cuba-us-relations.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/27/world/americas/cardinal-jaime-ortega-y-alamino-catholic-cuba-us-relations.html?_r=2)) in recent years. However, in many cases, those released from prison have been practically forced into exile as a condition of their freedom.

On the other hand, however, the use of arbitrary, short-term detentions to intimidate dissidents and separate them from the general population has skyrocketed. These short-term detentions rarely leave the same legal paper trail that the imprisonment of political dissidents does, making them harder for rights monitors to track. Moreover, detentions are often accompanied by physical violence, since they typically result from the government breaking up peaceful protests or marches, or involve raids on group activities in dissidents' homes.

Nonetheless, if these detentions have increased, it is in part in response to a general growth of social discontent and frustration, along with a newfound boldness and organizing capacity among the Cuban opposition.

## A New Generation of Cuban Dissidents



While Cuba's opposition is diverse in terms of ideology and strategy, it shares a commitment to nonviolence. In the 1960s and 1970s, dominant factions of the opposition, especially those based abroad, often resorted to terrorist attacks that arbitrarily targeted innocent civilians. Today, this approach is universally rejected as both immoral and counterproductive among the island's dissidents. Today's opposition is both sociologically and ideologically new. Its leaders came of age during the 1980s and 1990s; are largely homegrown, as opposed to being incubated from abroad; and defend peaceful action. There are even factions among today's opposition that seek to work within the current constitutional framework to bring about regime change "from the inside."

There has also been a notable change in the demographic makeup of Cuba's dissident groups. The island's first human rights groups were predominantly composed of Havana-based, white, urban intellectuals, some of whom had broken away from the Communist Party. These were often people who had been part of the system but then became disillusioned. A good example is the still-active Miriam Leiva and her late husband, the independent economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe: Both worked as government advisers and diplomats until they were purged for their supposedly "counterrevolutionary" views in the early 1990s.

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Today, the opposition is more diverse. For example, the Patriotic Union of Cuba (UNPACU) has a national network of several thousand members who tend to hail from, and be most active in, Cuba's eastern provinces. They **carry out weekly street actions** (<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article74496562.html>) usually accompanied by social-welfare outreach in their communities, in an effort to combine more-abstract political demands for human rights with a recognition of the more-immediate bread-and-butter needs of the average Cuban.

This strategy allows activists to target populations who were once the main beneficiaries of the Cuban Revolution's renowned social policies, but who have fared less well in the new reform era: Afro-Cubans, the poor and rural peasants. The current economic reforms have increased the role of the market and fueled a notable growth of poverty and inequality as the state **reduces its once-**

**comprehensive subsidies** (<http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/12/cubas-reforms-fail-to-reduce-growing-inequality/>). In that context, the opposition has sought to combine its traditional demand for civil and political rights with other social rights normally considered sacrosanct by the revolution's own ideology. This same economic crisis, combined with the limited space available for the opposition to exploit strategic opportunities, also helps explain the recent **uptick in Cuban rafters traversing the Florida Straits** (<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-cuban-migrant-crisis>), as well as the surge in other would-be immigrants to the U.S. who have **sought to make their way north from Ecuador** (<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/05/opinion/international/a-new-crisis-of-cuban-migration.html>) **or** (<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/05/opinion/international/a-new-crisis-of-cuban-migration.html>) through various South and Central American countries.

Among the island's major opposition organizations, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) is the leading rights group dedicated to documenting the government's repressive activities. These include politically motivated arrests, short-term detentions, beatings and the vandalizing of dissidents' homes. The political police also routinely confiscate special donations of food intended for political prisoners, toys provided to children as part of dissident social-outreach activities, and the donations of various international aid organizations. On May 3, the CCDHRN reported that the first four months of 2016 had **seen 5,351 politically motivated arrests or detentions** ([http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/CCDHRN-situa-detenciones-motivos-politicos\\_0\\_1991800809.html#.VyjlifwEnRI.twitter](http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/CCDHRN-situa-detenciones-motivos-politicos_0_1991800809.html#.VyjlifwEnRI.twitter)), setting a record-breaking pace relative to past years, which **were themselves record-breaking** ([http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/OVERVIEW-ABRIL\\_CYMFIL20160503\\_0001.pdf](http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/OVERVIEW-ABRIL_CYMFIL20160503_0001.pdf)) compared to previous years. If detentions continue throughout the remainder of the year at the current pace, we **can expect over 16,000 in 2016** (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/cuba>), while the organization documented 8,616 detentions in 2015, and 8,899 in 2014.

Another opposition group, the Ladies in White, emerged in 2003 to protest the arrests of the 75 so-called Black Spring dissidents. They remained active even after the 75, many of whom were the husbands and sons of the women who founded the group, **were eventually released** (<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2010/0713/Cuba-prisoner-release-Seven-Black-Spring-dissidents-are-freed-in-Spain>) between 2010 and 2011 through the intercession of the Catholic Church. Since 2015, the Ladies in White has led the #TodosMarchamos—or We All March—campaign, joining forces with other civic and dissident groups such as State of SATS and UNAPCU to demand the release of all remaining political prisoners and, more broadly, respect for universal human rights. Dressed in white and carrying signs, pink gladiolas and pictures of political prisoners, they stage a march each Sunday to publicly make their demands on the government. And each Sunday, they are routinely

rounded up and carted off to waiting police vans. They are also often met by throngs of government-organized “rapid response brigades” that shout them down and, together with the police, often resort to intimidation and assault to silence them.



*President Barack Obama meets with dissidents and other local Cubans at the U.S. Embassy, Havana, Cuba, March 22, 2016 (AP photo by Pablo Martinez Monsivais).*

Since June 2015, a team of pro bono lawyers led by Laritza Diversent under the umbrella of her public-interest legal consultancy, Cubalex, has partnered with other independent civil society organizations under the #Otro18 —or Another '18—campaign. The reference is to 2018, when Raul Castro has announced he will step down. The campaign is aimed at generating concrete proposals for an alternate plan of succession in that year based on an electoral reform law that would open up the political system to pluralism and competition. Moreover, the campaign has identified current obstacles that prevent Cuban citizens from influencing political decision-making and holding their political leaders accountable. Their reform proposals were presented by Cubalex—uninvited—to the Communist Party's Central Committee just ahead of the party congress in April.

In fact, the Cuban government recently announced that it would roll out a new electoral law



following the congress. This, together with previous changes that limited top political posts to two terms of five years each, has sparked speculation among intellectuals, dissidents and Cuban citizens in general about how far the electoral reforms will go. However, the decision to hold the congress without the broad public debate among party members and the general population that preceded the previous meeting in 2011 generated criticism and skepticism in the run-up to the gathering about the possibility of any real changes coming out of it. The congress's outcome, reviewed above, proved this skepticism well-founded. Nevertheless, Raul Castro typically avoids announcing dramatic changes at major events, preferring to **quietly implement his own brand of reforms** (<http://www.tampabay.com/features/humaninterest/in-cuba-raul-castro-has-the-clock-ticking-just-a-bit-faster/2157958>) "without haste but without pause" over time, after first ensuring that his hard-liner rearguard supports his policies.

At the same time, there is a growing acceptance in global public opinion, among international human rights organizations and within broad sectors of the Cuban opposition that the U.S. embargo is counterproductive to the promotion of democracy and human rights on the island. As Obama himself **admitted in his speech in Havana** (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/03/22/remarks-president-obama-people-cuba>), "A policy of isolation designed for the Cold War made little sense in the 21st century. The embargo was only hurting the Cuban people instead of helping them." The truth is that the unilateral U.S. sanctions did more to isolate the United States from the world and especially the rest of Latin America than they ever did to isolate the Cuban regime or undermine the revolution. Indeed, the embargo's biggest failure was perhaps that it tended to legitimize the Cuban government's "David and Goliath" discourse on U.S. relations, while doing nothing to empower independent actors in the opposition or Cuban civil society more broadly.

***The Cuban regime continues to fiercely defend a single legal political party, treating all dissidents as illegitimate at best, and anti-Cuban "mercenaries" at worst.***

Of course, Obama's new policy approach will not automatically cause the Cuban government to abandon its will to power or reduce its political control. The outcome of April's party congress



shows that just the opposite is true, at least in the short term. But the hope is that the recent diplomatic engagement between Cuba and the U.S. may reduce tensions and contribute to the emergence of more space for independent actors and civil society to thrive in Cuba. At the very least it will go a long way toward removing Uncle Sam as the Cuban government's tried-and-true *bête noire*, and focus both domestic and international attention on the many remaining internal obstacles standing in the way of Cubans' prosperity and freedom.

As Washington begins to balance its criticism of Cuba's human rights record with a policy of engagement in areas of mutual concern, other regional leaders may begin to speak out about the lack of an internal opening on the island. In this vein, an open letter [published in mid-April](http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/04/13/opinion/1460556644_711070.html) ([http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/04/13/opinion/1460556644\\_711070.html](http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/04/13/opinion/1460556644_711070.html)) by former Costa Rican Presidents Oscar Arias and Laura Chinchilla, signed by scores of Latin American intellectuals and calling for just such an opening, is a foreshadowing of what that might look like. (The English translation can be found [here](http://translatingcuba.com/cuba-must-end-apartheid-against-its-citizens-oscar-arias-laura-chinchilla/) (<http://translatingcuba.com/cuba-must-end-apartheid-against-its-citizens-oscar-arias-laura-chinchilla/>)).

## Independent Digital Media, Entrepreneurship and Tech Startups

One area where this hoped-for space has begun to emerge is among Cuba's fledgling independent digital media. Indeed, despite a state monopoly on mass media and one of the Western Hemisphere's lowest Internet access rates, in recent years Cuba has witnessed the emergence of a rich variety of independent digital media projects. Cubans seeking to overcome both political and material obstacles to free expression and association have gradually formed a number of independent news, information and entertainment outlets contributing to the expansion of the public sphere on the island.

Notable pioneers in this dynamic space include Yoani Sanchez's [14ymedio](http://www.14ymedio.com/) (<http://www.14ymedio.com/>); the hybrid island-diaspora news sites [Havana Times](http://www.havanatimes.org/) (<http://www.havanatimes.org/>) and [On Cuba](http://oncubamagazine.com/en/) (<http://oncubamagazine.com/en/>); the independent, nonprofit, public-interest journalism project [Periodismo de Barrio](http://periodismodebarrio.org/) (<http://periodismodebarrio.org/>); the provocative blogs [La Joven Cuba](https://jovencuba.com/) (<https://jovencuba.com/>) and [La Chiringa de Cuba](http://chiringadecuba.com/) (<http://chiringadecuba.com/>); the independent lay-Catholic publications [Convivencia](http://www.convivenciacuba.es/) (<http://www.convivenciacuba.es/>) and [Cuba Posible](http://cubaposible.net/) (<http://cubaposible.net/>); and [Vistar](http://vistarmagazine.com/) (<http://vistarmagazine.com/>), Cuba's cultural and entertainment equivalent to America's Rolling Stone.

These new media outlets are distinct from one another in their politics and positioning vis-à-vis the Cuban Revolution and the U.S. embargo. But they do share a common multifront struggle that

includes establishing their legitimacy in Cuba's polarized and contested public sphere; maintaining a degree of autonomy while preserving their access to the Internet and staying afloat financially; and becoming increasingly visible and accessible to the public while engaging in civil, productive debate over national issues.

This exciting development follows the growth of citizen journalism and an increase in the number and diversity of Cuba's independent bloggers since 2007. It has also been accompanied, and fueled somewhat, by the opening of 118 Internet cafés in June 2013, which grew to roughly 345 by the end of 2015; the possibility of accessing email via cell phone for the first time in 2014; and the spread across the island of an informal digital data-distribution system popularly known as "el paquete semanal," or the weekly packet. Finally, the recent [opening in June 2015](http://www.14ymedio.com/cienciaytecnologia/usuarios-conectan-diariamente-zonas-Cuba_0_1971402842.html)

([http://www.14ymedio.com/cienciaytecnologia/usuarios-conectan-diariamente-zonas-Cuba\\_0\\_1971402842.html](http://www.14ymedio.com/cienciaytecnologia/usuarios-conectan-diariamente-zonas-Cuba_0_1971402842.html)) of Cuba's first-ever 35 public Wi-Fi hotspots, which have since expanded to 85, with plans to open 80 more by the end of 2016, is only bound to facilitate the growth and social impact of Cuba's independent media among the population.

***Unilateral U.S. sanctions did more to isolate the U.S. from the world and the rest of Latin America than they ever did to isolate the Cuban regime or undermine the revolution.***

The government has responded to the proliferation of new media with a two-pronged strategy. First, it has continued to actively defame, intimidate and occasionally detain the most unapologetic independent journalists, while also internally blocking access to more critical sites such as 14ymedio. Second, it has been forced to tolerate a broad swath of more moderate independent media projects as a fait accompli since the spread of social media applications, smart phones and Cuba's ubiquitous flash drives has effectively eroded the state monopoly over the mass media. At the same time, the state media has been forced to become marginally more critical and informative since breaking news reported by bloggers and the independent digital media increasingly exposes its systematic bias and propagandistic blindness.

## **Cuba's Cuentapropistas**

During his trip to Havana, Obama was warmly received by the scores of Cuban cuentapropistas, or micro-entrepreneurs, who were invited to an unprecedented entrepreneurial forum co-organized by the two governments on March 21. The gathering also included numerous representatives from the Cuban-American business community and American tech-startup scene, invited to both defend Obama's engagement policy back home and build partnerships with startups in Cuba. During the event, Obama celebrated the fact that there are now a half-million licensed Cuban entrepreneurs who, together with the other parts of the nonstate sector, now make up one-third of the Cuban workforce.

However, Obama also used this opportunity to note the many obstacles that continue to hobble the expansion of Cuban entrepreneurship, ticking off a laundry list of the key internal hurdles, including a ban on most private professions, little access to small business loans or wholesale sources of inputs, the inability of the private sector to import supplies, a dual currency, infrastructural bottlenecks and the sidelining of women and Afro-Cubans.

With deft diplomacy and the offer of an olive branch, Obama shifted from these critical comments to a hopeful, encouraging note, [describing the obstacles as](http://elyuma.blogspot.com/2016/04/cuba-us-entrepreneurial-forum-with.html) (http://elyuma.blogspot.com/2016/04/cuba-us-entrepreneurial-forum-with.html) "areas where the United States hopes to be a partner as Cuba moves forward." He also openly recognized the Cuban government's apprehension that U.S. economic investment in and empowerment of Cuba's private sector might be nothing more than a Trojan horse of trade. Given this fear, while Obama encouraged deeper economic reforms on the island, he also insisted that the depth and pace of these changes will be determined by Cuba, not the U.S. He also reassured his mostly Cuban audience that the U.S. is no longer seeking to make Cuba fail—the historical goal of the embargo, which he explicitly called on Congress to end—but instead is "interested in Cuba succeeding."

### **Cuba's Dot-Commies?**

Despite the many remaining impediments to fostering the growth and dynamism of Cuban enterprise, a handful of tech-savvy Cubans are taking full, creative advantage of the small but significant crack that Castro has opened for the island's cuentapropistas. For example, Internet-incubated startups such as AlaMesa, Isladentro and Conoce Cuba all attempt to connect potential customers, both islanders and tourists, with the rapidly growing number and diversity of goods and services offered by Cuba's revitalized private sector through apps customized to function in Cuba's unique offline smartphone environment.

Given continued government restrictions on Cuban cuentapropistas, however, these fantastic startups cannot yet gain recognition as businesses with legal status, preventing them from engaging in financial transactions with foreign entities. Neither can they legally access foreign investment, import equipment, gain easy or inexpensive access to the Internet, or allow their customers to make payments or reservations using credit cards. All this combines to make Cuba's startups especially vulnerable to being swamped or gobbled up by the impending tide of international Internet service companies, such as OpenTable, Tripadvisor or Yelp, that are poised to reproduce Airbnb's propitious arrival in Cuba. On the bright side, legal changes in the U.S. between 2015 and 2016 have given these Cuban startups and the young, ambitious programmers behind them access to the United States to market their services.

## What's Next

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the concomitant onset of an unprecedented economic crisis euphemistically referred to on the island as the "special period," Cuba has witnessed elements of civil society gradually begin to occupy new spheres as the state draws back—more by default than design—from various economic, social and political spaces that it previously monopolized. These emergent groups are not aligned with or controlled by the Cuban government, though they're not necessarily opposed to it, either.

***Cuba's startups are vulnerable to being gobbled up by the impending tide of Internet service companies that are poised to reproduce Airbnb's propitious arrival in Cuba.***

In recent years, the island's long-repressed and often internally divided political opposition has both reacted to and attempted to take advantage of Cuba's changing international relations. The road to normalization with the U.S. has introduced new opportunities to Cuban civil society, but challenges facing a cross-section of emergent Cuban social actors persist, including for the island's independent digital media mavens and fledgling entrepreneurs, notably the young innovative techies behind its fascinating tech-startup scene.



However, apart from a modest opening to the market and a slow and expensive spread of Internet access, the strategy that guides the Cuban government's reaction to Obama's new policy of engagement seems to be to maximize benefits and concessions from the U.S. without ceding to any of its criticisms about political reform, human rights, and the need to respect independent civil society and expand opportunities for the nascent private sector. Such resistance is understandable given the U.S. posture that long sought to dictate change in Cuba from abroad and with marginal benefits for the Cuban people.

Washington must take this strategic approach on the part of Havana into account as it continues the United States' ongoing diplomatic engagement with Cuba. This will require U.S. policymakers to strike a difficult but necessary balance between pragmatism, which recognizes Cuban sovereignty under its current leadership, and an unconditional solidarity with the Cuban people who demand greater civil liberties, political rights and personal autonomy. They should do so not only because it is necessary in order to carry on the process of normalization, but because Cuba's own citizens deserve it.

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