

Latin american political systems: a case study of cuba research paper sample

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Introduction

The republic of Cuba is an island which comprises one significantly large island and numerous small ones. Cuba boasts an area of approximately 110, 860km² and can be safely said to be one of the largest states in the Caribbean. Cuba is barely 160km from Florida. In fact, the Straits of Florida separate the country from Florida while the Windward Passage separates the country from Haiti and finally the Gulf of Mexico and the Yucatan Channel separates the country from Mexico. According to the United Nations report of 2005, Cuba has a population of 11, 275, 000 with an annual population growth rate of 0. 44% per annum. Approximately 10% of this population was aged above 65years while 21% was below 15years of age. The population density then was 102 people per square kilometer which roughly translates

to 263 people per meter. The Cuban population by ethnicity is as follows: 51% of the population comprises of the mulattos, 31% whites of Spanish descent, 11% blacks and finally the Chinese account for 1% of the population. Cuba has a predominantly native population. This implies that almost all Cubans are Citizens by birth.

Education in Cuba

Like many communist states, Cuba takes education very seriously. This is because all communists rely heavily on education to advance and propagate their ideologies. To this effect, the strides made by the country in the education sector are staggering. Based on the developed world set standards, the Cuban education system can be safely termed to be among the best. This is the case because education in Cuba is universal implying there's basic education for all children and adults. Also, the country has high enrollment and attendance rates in the education sector due to the active role the government plays. The country also boasts gender equity and equality at all education levels from elementary to higher learning institutions. This gender equity is strongly complimented by equal educational opportunities for all regardless of their socioeconomic background (Griffiths and Williams 34) What Cuba and Venezuela clearly demonstrate is that with a fundamental shift in the political economy towards socialism, universal access to education, with a high degree of equity in terms of opportunity and outcomes, is something that can be achieved quite quickly. In addition to this, the Cuban curriculum is pro-science and as a result the country has invested massively in research with

emphasis on chemistry and medicine. In fact, to this effect Cuban students have consistently emerged the best in Latin America in mathematics and science prowess across all grades and both sexes. The instructional strategies employed in the Cuban education system are of high standards are consistent across the country; they are similar in both rural and urban settings. Despite the financial challenges, the country has been able to achieve this because of the following.

The government has made early childhood education mandatory and actually committed to ensuring this directive is adhered to. Thus, access to quality early childhood education and quality medical care act to complement the comprehensive Cuban education sector. Other complementary programs in place include adult and informal education programs to ensure that the whole country is literate. The Cuban government has also gone ahead to put in place a framework to ensure that the local communities are actively involved in the management of educational institutions within their specific jurisdictions. In addition to this, Cuban teachers and tutors are amongst the best facilitated in the world. This is the case because the government has invested heavily in pre and in-service training of teachers, there are mechanisms in place to motivate them through incentives and rewards for the innovative as well as efficient academic staff members. As a result of this, the government has successfully cultivated a culture of professionalism amongst the teachers and tutors (Gomez 22) The adaptation of the role and professional standards of the academic community was geared toward financially supporting the academic community to design academic programs that met the needs of society and

that would be coordinated with the business sector. At the same time, the plan called for strengthening the social and professional status of teachers and academics. This has been complemented by low-cost educational materials and the zeal of both the teachers and students to adapt the national curriculum. The Cuban educational curriculum is also differentiated based on the special needs of various categories of students ranging from rural students to students with disabilities. In addition to this, the government has ensured that the education sector is interlinked with the work sector (Gomez 22) The adaptation of an educational system that takes into consideration the everyday needs of society. This implies that the educational curriculum is modeled around the needs of the job market and that all that passes through the Cuban system is guaranteed of employment. Finally, one of the major objectives of the Cuban education system is to enhance social cohesion and tolerance.

Healthcare in Cuba

The Cuban healthcare sector is another success story that is solely accredited to the government. In fact healthcare transition in the country is synonymous with the Cuban Revolution and as a result has undergone significant changes over the past 50years. To this effect, there are fears that the healthcare is on the verge of negative transition in the post-Castro era (Ullmann 4). Health care provision in Cuba has a long history and has been the focus of much international attention, as the system has had to adjust to significant changes over the years. Considered, at times, to be a showcase of the Cuban Revolution, the system nonetheless has gone through a number

of revolutions and evolutions itself in the past 50 years. This is because the current state of the Cuban healthcare is one of the legacies of the Castro regime. Prior to the Castro regime, the healthcare in Cuba was limited to the urban settings and was predominantly controlled by the private sector (Ullmann 4) In 1959, approximately 6, 600 physicians were practicing medicine in Cuba, and physicians' services were concentrated in the urban areas. The doctor to patient ratio was 92: 100, 000 and the patient to hospital bed ration in urban setting was 12: 1000 while it was 1: 1000 in the rural area (de Gordon as cited in Ullmann 4) While the overall physician-to-population ratio in Cuba was 92 per 100, 000, the ratio in Havana was 238 per 100, 000, compared with 40 per 100, 000 in the province of Oriente. The whole country had a paltry 1000 trained nurses. Coupled with this, the country only had one medical training school. The Cuban government has effectively countered these challenges by creating healthcare infrastructure equitably distributed across the country with emphasis on sufficient provision of medical services as well as personnel on the backdrop of limited resources.

The government thus has had to train physicians with emphasis on communist philosophy that supports universal healthcare for all and abhor privatization of medical care. As a result, the Cuban government has effectively guaranteed its citizenry the right to quality healthcare regardless of ethnicity, race and socio-economic background as stipulated and mandated by the country's constitution. The Cuban healthcare sector is modeled around the principle of universal healthcare for all. This implies that the public is guaranteed provision of comprehensive, quality and free

healthcare everywhere in the country. Coupled to this, there are health campaigns in place to combat the disease threat in the country. The management of the Cuban health sector is the sole responsibility and mandate of the ministry of public health. This implies that healthcare is regulated and controlled by the government in a bid to protect the patient and ensure that all citizens access proper healthcare (Carrin 280). There are Municipal Polyclinics in Cuba that specifically target healthcare provision in the work environment, schools, and child care centers. As a result the government has invested heavily in the healthcare sector in terms of research. Also, Cuba's biotechnology sector is one of the most developed and innovative in the world. To this, effect the Cuban innovations include treatments for Parkinson's patients, anti-cholesterol drugs, interferon, cancer drugs, and work on vaccines against Type-B meningococcal meningitis and Type B hepatitis. Though, the communist nature of Cuba has limited partnerships with international pharmaceuticals companies hence denying the country much needed foreign exchange. Finally, the Cuban healthcare system is under threat mainly due to the economic status of the country. It will be challenging for a poor country such as Cuba to maintain quality healthcare standards in the future.

The economic landscape in Cuba

As far as economic indicators are concerned, Cuba is categorized as developing or third world country. This is mainly attributed to the fact that Cuba is a predominantly communist state. This implies that the government owns a large percentage of the production units. As testimony to this, the

public sector and all affiliated industries employ 82% of the Cuban labor force. Other factors contributing to economic woes include the collapse of the former Soviet Union hence denying the country the Russian financial aid it was accustomed to and the fact that the US imposed economic sanctions on the country in the cold war and post-cold war eras. This was worsened by the several attempts by the US government to have regime change in the Cuba in the 1990s. To this effect, the Cuban economy performed the worst in between 1989 and 1993 (Sullivan 21) when Cuba's economic slide began in 1989, the government showed little willingness to adopt any significant market-oriented economic reforms, but in 1993, faced with unprecedented economic decline, Cuba began to change policy direction and implemented a number of policy measures. Beginning in 1993, Cubans were allowed to own and use U. S. dollars and to shop at dollar-only shops previously limited to tourists and diplomats. Self-employment was authorized in more than 100 occupations in 1993, most in the service sector, and by 1996 more than 200,000 Cubans had become small entrepreneurs. The economic decline in the period is estimated to range between 35% and 50%. Though, the Cuban economy picked up strongly from 1994 as a result of limited implementation of market-directed reforms to average an annual growth of 3.5% annually between the years 1994 and 2000. The best economic years for the country were in the period between the years 2005 and 2008. In fact the economic growth rate was 5.8%, 11.2%, 12.1%, 7.3% and 4.1% in the years 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 and respectively. This is solely attributed to the economic reforms adapted by Raul Castro since he assumed presidency in an acting capacity in 2006. Raul advocated for economic reforms in the

country and actively involved the Cuban public in the entire process (Sullivan 22) After Raúl Castro officially assumed the presidency in 2008, his government announced a series of economic changes. In his first speech as president in February 2008, Raúl promised to make the government smaller and more efficient, to review the potential revaluation of the Cuban peso, and to eliminate excessive bans and regulations that curb productivity. In March, the government announced that it would lift restrictions on the sales of consumer products such as computers, microwaves, and DVD and video players as well as on the use of cell phones.

When Raul assumed full presidency in the year 2008, the country experienced radical economic reforms which include elimination of excessive embargoes and bans that regulate production, reevaluation of the Cuban Peso, lift of restrictions in the sale and purchase of some consumer products such as microwaves and DVDS as well as use of mobile phones and overhauling legislations that limited the maximum remunerations a state employed worker could earn (Pujol 1) In his first speech as president in February 2008, Raúl promised to make the government smaller and more efficient, to review the potential revaluation of the Cuban peso, and to eliminate excessive bans and regulations that curb productivity. So far, three main areas of structural reforms have been advanced: A liberalization of private consumption, a turning over of fallow lands to private exploitation, and a flexibilization of the labor market. The government has also been on a mission to streamline the public sector by making it smaller and more efficient through firing inefficient state employees. In fact, the Cuban government will lay off an estimated 1. 2 million workers over the next half a

decade. The Raul reign has also directed economic reforms towards the agricultural sector especially the sugar industry because it is a major pillar of the economy (Sullivan 24) A significant reform effort under Raúl Castro has focused on the agricultural sector, a vital issue because Cuba reportedly imports some two-thirds of its food needs. In an effort to boost food production, the government began in 2008 to give farmers more discretion over how to use their land and what supplies to buy. The Cuban economy is largely dependent on export of medical professionals especially to Venezuela, tourism (the country had 2. 53million tourists in the year 2010 alone), nickel and cobalt mining (this is a joint effort between the government Sherritt International, a Canadian company), the sugar industry (though it has been declining over the past two decades) and finally remittances from relatives abroad especially the US (over \$1million is remitted to Cuba from USA on annual basis).

Religion in Cuba

Despite the fact that the Cuban constitution guarantees all the citizens the right and freedom to profess and practice diverse religious beliefs within the law, the Cuban government has in the past placed restrictions on this freedom. This restrictions have been upheld by both the Castro regimes; Fidel's and Raul's. Religion in Cuba is thus characterized by government interference despite the fact that Cubans are traditionally spiritualists. Unregistered religious organizations and activist religious leaders have been subject to intense government harassment for the longest time. Religious activities can only be conducted in government approved sites and under the

surveillance of the country's security forces. To this effect, the government implemented new religious restrictions that effectively banned the operation of house churches consequently cementing the Cuban government's intense control on religion. Also, the government interaction with the religious community is facilitated by the Office of Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party. Though, this engagement is regulated by the Ministry of Interior Affairs which is in charge the country's security forces. However, this new regulations made it easier for foreign clergy to obtain work permits. Despite calls from the international community with the US at the fore front, the Cuban government has refused to lift the bans and restrictions currently imposed on religious practices. However, it is important to note that discrimination based on religion is non-existent in Cuba.

Statistics on the demographic characteristic of the Cuban religious community are inconclusive. This is because they are marred by a lot of inconsistencies based on the organization or individuals conducting the empirical studies. It is clear though that at least 40% of the Cuban population professes the Catholic faith. Protestants on the other hand account for less than 10% of the population. Of the Protestants, the Baptists account for the majority percentile of the believers. Other Protestants include the Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist and the Evangelical Lutheran churches. Minority religious groups in Cuba include the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Free Masons, the Jewish and Muslim communities. Empirical evidence has also suggests that an estimated 2% of the Cuban population practices and profess the Santeria faith which is a traditional religion with roots from the West African native religions.

Culture in Cuba

The Cuban culture enjoys international recognition for being amongst the richest cultures of the world. This is solely attributed to ethnic/racial diversity within the country incorporating the Chinese, Cubans of African descent, Jews and finally White Cubans. Almost all Cubans can converse in fluent Spanish which is similar to other dialects but distinctive as a result of the expressive hand gestures and the rhythmic speaking. The languages that were spoken by indigenous Cubans are extinct in these modern days. In addition to this, Cubans are friendly and very social people who are accustomed to socializing both at home and work places. In fact, bodily contact is viewed upon as harmless unlike in the US where it is offensive in most settings. This culture is modeled around the Latin American preference for communal living. Being generous and charitable are valued traits in Cuba. Visitors are always welcome and fence enclosures common in other parts of the world are absent in Cuba. To this effect, tourists are always treated well and received warmly in Cuba. Disagreements and arguments are favored by the Cubans to relieve tension and thus Cubans always argue to the exhaustion of both the conflicting parties.

The staple food in Cuba is rice and beans supplemented by fried plantains, tubers, and vegetables (Wilk and Barbosa 43). The cucumber is the most common vegetable due to the fact that it is cheap to acquire. In the past, beef used to be common but that has changed because it has been overtaken by more economically viable alternatives which include chicken and pork. In fact a pound of low quality ham (jamon vikin) made from pork costs only \$2. In the present day Cuba, social classes and cases are not used

in determining the access to employment opportunities, healthcare, education and amongst other socioeconomic services. Also being a communist state, Cubans are used to tough economic times because everyone shares hardships similarly; implying that wealth and poverty are equally distributed unlike in capitalistic states. Today, gender equality has been incorporated in the Cuban culture successfully. The government advocates for incorporation of women in white collar jobs and to this effect has funded day care centers to free women from child rearing duties so that they can advance in their respective careers. Though, men still expect women to do their share of domestic chores despite effort by the government to quash this notion. Despite the gender equality status enjoyed in Cuba, women are still underrepresented in the highest cadres of governance, military and politics.

The political and governance system in Cuba

The political structure in Cuba is referred to as Democratic Centralism whereby all citizens have the right to engage in political, economic and social debates but definitely subject to societal and government hierarchies. Though, ultimate authority rests with the president and the symbols of presidency at both local and provincial levels. Governance in Cuba is based on the Cuban constitution that was passed in 1976 by 95% majority backing. According to the Cuban constitution a presidential term lasts for a maximum of five years and there is no limit to the number of terms one can vie for presidency successfully. In case, of absence, death or illness of the president of Cuba, the powers of the presidency automatically fall to the vice president

of the republic of Cuba. Cuba's National Parliament, the National Assembly of People's Power (Asamblea Nacional de Poder Popular), has a membership of 609 members who each serve a five-year term. Members of parliament in Cuba are elected via a public referendum. All Cubans aged over 16 years and without criminal records can participate in the electoral process (Simons 113). In order for a candidate to be considered the elected Deputy for a specific constituency, they must garner at least 50% of the total valid votes cast. The constitution also guarantees free, fair, partial and equal election opportunities (Simons 113). The electioneering process shall be conducted through secret ballot as stipulated and mandated by the constitution. The law also stipulates that at least two candidates must vie for the post of Deputy and consequently limits the number of candidacy to eight. Voter turnout in Cuba is always consistent and well over 95%.

It is the duty of the national assembly to elect the Council of Ministers (the cabinet) and the Council of State. These two councils constitute the executive arm of the Cuban government. Therefore, for one to be elected as president of Cuba, they must be elected by the national assembly as president to both the Council of State and Council of Ministers. It must be mentioned that only members of the national legislative assembly are viable to be elected as members of both the Council of State and the Council of Ministers. This implies that for one to be the president of Cuba, first they must secure at least 50% of the cast votes from their respective constituencies to become a member of the national assembly (cuba-solidarity.org 1) To be President of Cuba and the Council of State therefore, you have to be an elected member of the National Assembly and therefore

have to have been elected by over 50% of the electorate in their own constituency (as Fidel is currently). In turn, Fidel has to be elected as President by a vote of the parliament. Then one must also be elected by the national assembly as the president of both the Council of State and the Council Of Ministers. Cuba is a one-party state; the Cuban Communist Party (CCP). Though, it is not mandatory for one to be a member of the CCP for them to be eligible for membership of the legislative assembly (Sullivan 9; cuba-solidarity. org 1). Under Cuba's one-party system, the overwhelming majority of those elected are PCC members. Political parties are not involved in the selection of candidates in the elections or in campaigns for the Assembly. Candidates do not have to be members of the Communist Party to run. Almost half Cuba's national parliaments are not members of the Communist Party. In fact, half the present members of the national assembly are non-members of the CCP. This implies that the CCP has no bearing whatsoever on Cuba's politics and governance and the decisions reached by the CCP apply strictly to its members. Thus candidacy is solely based on one's track record rather than expensively funded party campaigns effectively giving ordinary Cubans the chance to be elected as members of the national assembly. Nomination of candidates viable to be members of the national assembly is determined by community and civil society organizations such as trade unions during their local meetings (cuba-solidarity. org 1) Community and civil society organizations such as trade unions play a major role in the nomination and selection of candidates through local meetings of a commission set up for the purpose.

The national assembly is the supreme body with legislative power and is

directly voted in by the people. All the decisions made by the president, the Council of State and the Council of Ministers must be referred to the national assembly before being adapted. It must also be mentioned that the Cuban National Assembly meets twice a year. Membership to the national assembly is highly representative of the various groupings of the Cuban society. In fact the current composition of the Cuban legislative assembly is as follows: out of 609 deputies, 219 are women (36%), 8% more than the previous legislature. 33% are black (4% more than in the previous Assembly) and 25% are manual workers in productive or service industries (cuba-solidarity. org

1) The current Cuban Parliament (2006) is extremely representative. Of the 609 deputies in the National Assembly: 219 are women (36%), 8% more than the previous legislature. 33% are black (4% more than in the previous Assembly) and 25% are manual workers in productive or service industries.

In Cuba, there are also provincial and municipal assemblies that are voted in directly by the people and are directly accountable to the electorate (Sullivan

9) More recently, on October 21, 2012, more than 7 million Cubans went to the polls to select representatives to 168 Municipal Assemblies of People's Power—a second round where no candidate received more than 50% of the vote was held on November 4, 2012 (except for Santiago and Holguin provinces because of Hurricane Sandy). These two assemblies can be voted out by the electorate through a vote of no confidence.

The early history and reign of Fidel Castro in Cuba

Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz was born on the 13th day of August the year 1926 in Birán, a town in South-East Cuba, in the former Oriente Province to Angel

Castro y Argiz and Lina Ruz González. It is important to mention that Fidel and five of his siblings were born out of wedlock. Though, later Angel married his maid and cook Lina. Fidel spent the better part of his childhood on his father's farm then later progressed to Catholic boarding schools where he discovered his talent and passion for football. Fidel discovered his interest in politics while he was a student at the University of Havana in the year 1945. In 1947, revolutionary Fidel joined the Caribbean Legion (Hastedt 138). The legion comprised mainly of political exiles that had plans of overthrowing the Caribbean dictators. His first revolutionary act was in 1948 when he travelled Bogotá in Colombia with plans of disrupting the Pan-American Union Conference but he ended up joining rioters protesting the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán. In October of the same year, Fidel married Mirta Diaz-Balart, his fellow student at the university and together they had a single child only. He graduated from law school in 1950 and started practicing law immediately though he kept his political interests alive. After a series of failed coup attempts between 1953 and 1960, Fidel finally became the president of Cuba. Fidel had been the Cuban president for over four and half decades when he resigned in the year 2008 passing the presidency to his younger brother Raul (International Business Publications 112)

In his forty plus years reign in power, Fidel transformed Cuba from a capitalist to a communist state. This he achieved by severing ties with USA and forming close links with the former Soviet Union. As a result, the US government has made several attempts to overthrow and even assassinate Fidel over the period he was president. All these attempts were however

unsuccessful. The high notes of Fidel's reign include agricultural, healthcare and educational reforms while the low notes of his rule include the failed economy, food shortages and totalitarian governance style that he favored. Though, it must be mentioned that the failed economy was as a result of the economic sanctions that the US government imposed on Cuba following the Cuban Missile crisis. Fidel Castro retired from politics and presidency in the year 2008 on medical grounds (Sullivan 6) Fidel Castro served as head of state and government through his position as president of the Council of State from 1976 until February 2008. Also, in the last two decades of his reign, Fidel implemented a few market reforms that saw the economy grow at a steady rate of 3.5% p. a.

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