Freedom House

Cuba

	2017	2018
Internet Freedom Status**	**Not Free**	**Not Free**
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	21	21
Limits on Content (0-35)	26	26
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	32	32
TOTAL* (0-100)	**79**	**79**

*0=most free, 100=least free
**A total score of 0-30=Free, 31-60=Partly Free, 61-100=Not Free

Key Developments, June 1, 2017 - May 31, 2018

- Paid public access to the internet via state telecom monopoly ETECSA continued to expand during the coverage period, with the number of Wi-Fi hotspots growing to 673, home-based access reaching over 27,000 customers, and the launch of the first possibility for public access to the internet via cell phones in December 2017 (see Availability and Ease of Access).
- The government continued to harass, detain, and jail independent digital journalists. Several independent journalists have faced prosecution for "usurpation of legal capacity," which prohibits "carrying out acts belonging to a profession the exercise of which one is not duly prepared" (see Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities).
- Several dissident and independent news outlets continued to be blocked on the island. In February 2018, the independent online outlet *El Estornudo* published an editorial denouncing a recent move to block the site, prompting other independent digital media to repost the message in solidarity (see Blocking and Filtering).

Introduction

Despite recent moves to increase access to the internet on the island, Cuba remains one of the world's least connected and most repressive environments for information and communication technologies.

A 7-month-long cycle to elect municipal, provincial, and national assemblies culminated in the April 19 election of 58-year-old Communist Party stalwart Miguel Díaz-Canel as Cuba's new president. Raúl Castro stepped down after serving two 5-year terms (2008-2018) but remained in the powerful post of Party First Secretary. While Díaz-Canel had made public comments in the past that hinted at his relative openness to allowing Cubans greater access to information technology and the internet, a video where he parrots hardline positions of digital control was leaked to the public in August 2017, diming hopes that he might inject a new dynamism and open-mindedness into Cuba's moribund state of internet freedom.[1]

Continuing its initial expansion begun in summer 2015, the Cuban government's telecommunications monopoly ETECSA continued to deploy Wi-Fi hotspots in public parks across the island, reaching 673 by March 2018. It also extended its "Nauta Hogar" home-based internet access rollout, which began with less than 2,000 customers in Old Havana in December 2016. It now includes more than 27,000 DSL internet connections for paying customers in all of Cuba's major cities. Additionally, ETECSA announced that during 2018 cell phone internet plans would become available for the first time, and started granting access to select users.[2] However, prices for internet access continued to be exorbitant for the average Cuban.

Independent civil society and media activists continued to be systematically harassed and have often been prevented from traveling to professional meetings abroad. A number of them, including the independent internet TV producer Ileana Hernández, and the reporters Sol García and Henry Constantín, have been served official government warnings ("*advertencias*") or charged with practicing journalism without a license in order to silence them. A number of popular internet sites are unavailable in Cuba, including independent media outlets such *Cuba Encuentro*, *Café Fuerte*, *CiberCuba*, and *El Estornudo*, which are blocked by the Cuban government due to those sites' critical content. A recent island-based study by the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI) found 41 blocked sites.[3] Additionally, services of some US-based internet companies are inaccessible in Cuba due to US regulations under the embargo.

Meanwhile, a "Cuba Internet Task Force" ordered by President Donald Trump attracted considerable attention, notably the Cuban government's initial rejection as a subversive affront to its sovereignty.[4] Convening U.S. government and non-governmental representatives for the first time in February 2018, the task force's stated aim is to examine the challenges and opportunities for expanding internet access, with the goal of promoting "the free and unregulated flow of information in Cuba." [5]

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1 "Video offers rare glimpse of hardline ideology from presumed next leader of Cuba," Nora Gámez Torres, *Miami Herald*, August 22, 2017 (www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article168657017.html).

2 Sarah Marsh, " Communist-run Cuba starts rolling out internet on mobile phones," Reuters, July 17, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-internet/communist-run-cuba-starts-rolling-out-internet-on-mobile-phones-idUSKBN1K62U7

3 "Google global cache servers are online in Cuba, but Google's App Engine is blocked," Larry Press, The Internet in Cuba (blog), September 21, 2017 (www.laredcubana.blogspot.fr/2017/09/google-global-cache-servers-are-online.html); "Fact checking the recent news about Google in Cuba," Larry Press, The Internet in Cuba (blog), September 7, 2017 (www.laredcubana.blogspot.fr/2017/09/fact-checking-recent-news-about-google.html); "There is one place where freedom of expression exists in Cuba: Google servers," Nora Gámez-Torres, *Miami Herald*, September 1, 2017 (www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article170757412.html).

4 Sarah Marsh, "Cuba hands note of protest to U.S. over internet task force," Reuters, February 1, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-usa/cuba-hands-note-of-protest-to-u-s-over-internet-task-force-idUSKBN1FL3Z1

5 U.S. Department of State, "Inaugural Meeting of the Cuba Internet Task Force," February 7, 2018, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/02/278052.htm

Obstacles to Access

Penetration rates and internet speeds continue to lag behind regional averages, and access to the global internet in Cuba is extremely restricted, due to high prices and government regulation of access points. Nevertheless, some openings have taken place over the past years, and more Cubans have gained access to the global internet or to other channels for sharing information with fellow citizens. During the past year, the government's priority focused on expanding the number of Wi-Fi hotspots and home-based internet access, as well as testing internet via cell phone.

Availability and Ease of Access

According to most recent figures published by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Cuba's internet penetration reached 42.98 percent in 2016, up from 37.31 percent in 2015.[6] However, these figures may also include users who can only access the government-controlled intranet. Experts have estimated that a much smaller percentage of Cubans have access to the global internet.[7] Most Cubans continue to face extremely slow connections of 1 Mbps, even at Wi-Fi hotspots.[8] In December 2017, the state-owned Telecommunications Company of Cuba S.A. (ETECSA) began to route some of its international internet traffic through the private, Luxemburg-based satellite company SES, diversifying its connections beyond reliance on the ALBA-1 fiber optic cable from Venezuela.[9]

For years, most Cubans have been denied internet access or relegated to a government-controlled intranet, which consists of a national email system, a Cuban encyclopedia, a pool of educational materials and open-access journals, Cuban websites, and foreign websites that are supportive of the Cuban government. Resolution 92/2003 prohibits email and other ICT service providers from granting access to individuals who are not approved by the government. Entities that violate these regulations can be penalized with suspension or revocation of their authorization to provide access.[10] The intranet can be accessed through government-run internet access centers, the offices of ETECSA, or state-run cybercafés. Although most foreign websites are now available at state-run access sites, the cost of accessing non-Cuban sites remains higher.

While home connections were virtually non-existent before December 2016, the government has taken steps to enable public access to wired and wireless internet in recent years. In June 2013, citizens began to access the internet through broadband connections to the new fiber-optic cable at government-run "*telepuntos*" or

6 National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI), *"Tecnología de la Información y las Comunicaciones, 2016,"* [Information and Communication Technology, 2016] http://www.onei.cu/aec2016/17%20Tecnologias%20de%20la%20Informacion.pdf (note: this report was published in August 2017 but covers the calendar year 2016).

7 For example, Cuban programmer Salvi Pascual of Apretaste.com found that while 30 percent of Cubans (3 million people) have some sort of "internet" access, the vast majority of these (2.8 million) have access to e-mail only, with just 5 percent (560,000) enjoying full web access. This estimate is based on an anonymous survey of approximately 1,000 users in Cuba, collected in 2016 through the app Apretaste, which offers uncensored access to the internet via email. See: https://apretaste.com/welcome.

8 Jack Karsten and Darrel M. West, "Cuba slowly expands Internet access," *Tech Tank* (blog), Brookings Institute, July 2, 2015, http://brook.gs/1KDrxLF; note however that the Cuban Minister of Communications reported in July 2017 that "international broadband speed doubled from 4 Gb/s to 8 Gb/s during 2016," "Diputados analizan Política Integral para el Perfeccionamiento de la Informatización de la Sociedad en Cuba," [Delegates analyse Comprehensive Policy for the Improvement of the Computerization of Society in Cuba], *CubaDebate*, July 13, 2017, www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2017/07/13/diputados-analizan-politica-integral-para-el-perfeccionamiento-de-la-informatizacion-de-la-sociedad-en-cuba/#anexo-929649.

9 "Cuba opta por más internet por satélite en lugar de la fibra óptica," *14ymedio*, February 20, 2018 (www.14ymedio.com/nacional/Cuba-mantiene-dependencia-internet-satelite_0_2386561328.html); "Cuban satellite connectivity -- today and (maybe?) tomorrow," Larry Press, The Internet in Cuba (blog), December 14, 2017, www.laredcubana.blogspot.fr/2017/12/cuban-satellite-connectivity-today-and.html

10 According to the resolution, "Cuban websites that offer e-mail services cannot implement the creation of e-mail (Webmail) via an automatic process for natural persons or entities that are not duly authorized." Legislación para el Sistema Nacional de Salud, Resolución Ministerial No 92/2003, July 18, 2003, http://bit.ly/1jhSxdD

navigation halls. Between 2016 and 2017 the government's priority shifted from these cybercafés to expanding the number of Wi-Fi hotspots and launching its first home-access pilot project under the name "Nauta Hogar." According to ETECSA, there were more than 1,651 public access points on the island by March 2018, including state-run cybercafés, public Wi-Fi hotspots, and internet connections at hotels, youth computer clubs, and post offices.

This growth is mainly due to the continued rollout of more Wi-Fi hotspots, which in early 2018, numbered 673 but are expected to exceed 800 by the end of 2018.[11] First launched in June 2015, paid public Wi-Fi hotspots accessible through the government platform Nauta have become a popular way to access the internet, despite the high cost and complaints about the quality of service. ETECSA has boasted that some 250,000 users connect daily at Wi-Fi zones and Havana's iconic seaside promenade, the Malecón, has been slowly converted into one long continuous Wi-Fi hotspot between 2016 and 2018[12][13]

Users pay for internet service directly at navigation halls or by purchasing a 1- or 5-hour "Nauta" card, which allows them to access temporary accounts, valid for 30 calendar days from the date of the first session. Cuban citizens and permanent residents are also able to open permanent Nauta accounts, complete with a username, password, and e-mail address (which can be linked to their cell phones for direct access to their Nauta e-mail when not near a Wi-Fi hotspot). Users must accept the higher level of surveillance associated with the convenience of such personal accounts. ETECSA monitors accounts and retains the right to end a user's access for a sweeping range of violations (see Surveillance, Privacy, and Anonymity). Since these two services were inaugurated in 2013, a total of 1.3 million permanent accounts have been opened and 11 million 1-hour cards have been sold.[14]

Etecsa also extended its "Nauta Hogar" home-based internet access rollout, which began with less than 2,000 potential customers in Old Havana in December 2016. While Etecsa expects to have a total of more than 67,000 Cuban homes connected to the internet via DSL by the end of 2018, 95 percent of the 27,000 customers already connected have opted for the slowest speed (1mbps) at the lowest monthly cost ($15 for 30 hours).[15] This likely indicates that the service's high cost and the company's technical challenges are major obstacles to the spread of this kind of service to a greater number or proportion of the population.[16]

In December 2017, state telecommunications agency ETECSA announced that it would begin to offer internet service to cell phone customers in 2018. By August 2018, the government tested mobile internet nationwide for

11 "Statistics and Predictions from Informatica 2018," Larry Press, *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), March 23, 2018; See also: http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2018/03/19/como-marcha-el-proceso-de-informatizacion-de-la-sociedad-cubana/#anexo-1034787

12 "Unos 200 mil usuarios se conectan diariamente en las zonas wifi de Cuba" [Some 200,000 users connect to Wi-Fi hotspots on a daily basis in Cuba], *EFE*, March 29, 2016, http://bit.ly/2cnCs6g. See also "El ONEI dice que el número de usuarios de internet llegó a casi cuatro millones en 2015," [The ONEI says that the number of internet users reached almost 4 million in 2015], October 27, 2016, http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1477608755_26313.html; "ETECSA planea establecer conexión a internet en el Malecón," [ETECSA plans to establish an internet connection along the Malecón], *Diario de Cuba*, September 21, 2016, www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1474471537_25466.html; "Las tarifas de Nauta Hogar oscilan entre 15 y 115 CUC," [The prices of Nauta Hogar range from 15 to 115 CUCs], Luz Escobar, *14ymedio*, March 1, 2017, www.14ymedio.com/nacional/Etecsa-tarifas-Nauta_Hogar-pesos_convertibles_0_2172982686.html

13 "Cuba supera los mil puntos públicos de acceso a Internet" [Cuba surpasses more than 1,000 public internet access points], *CiberCuba*, September 9, 2016, http://bit.ly/2eFOZVm; see also "Cuba cuenta con 250.000 conexiones diarias a internet, pese a triplicar los puntos wifi," [Cuba counts 250,000 daily connections to the internet, despite tripling its Wi-Fi hotspots], *14ymedio*, September 8, 2016, http://www.14ymedio.com/cienciaytecnologia/Cuba-conexiones-diarias-internet-triplicar_0_2068593131.html

14 "Cuba cuenta con 250.000 conexiones diarias a internet, pese a triplicar los puntos wifi," [Cuba counts 250,000 daily connections to the internet, despite tripling its Wi-Fi hotspots], *14ymedio*, September 8, 2016, www.14ymedio.com/cienciaytecnologia/Cuba-conexiones-diarias-internet-triplicar_0_2068593131.html

15 "Statistics and Predictions from Informatica 2018," Larry Press, *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), March 23, 2018.

16 "Statistics and predictions from Informatica 2018," Larry Press, The Internet in Cuba (blog), March 23, 2018 (www.laredcubana.blogspot.fr/2018/03/statistics-and-predictions-from.html).

nine hours, though users reported that the connection was very slow.[17] While a select number of users were reportedly already granted access to mobile internet, the official launch date of the service remained unknown.[18] During spring 2018, ETECSA tested this new internet via cell phone service in parts of Havana and in a number of top tourist destinations such as Varadero beach.[19] 3G technology began operating in Cuba in 2017.

Although Cuba still has the lowest mobile phone penetration rate in Latin America, the rate is rising. According to a report by Maimir Mesa Ramos, Cuba's Minister of Communications, by March 2018, some 4.6 million Cubans subscribed to cell phone plans, and that number is expected to surpass 5 million by the end of 2018.[20] Indeed, at a news conference in early June, ETECSA vice president Jorge Luis Valdés Hernández indicated that there were then already 5.1 million active mobile accounts in Cuba.[21] Due to second generation cell phone infrastructure, most mobile phone users are unable to browse the web, but it is possible to send and receive international text messages and images with certain phones. Moreover, a growing number of Cubans have more advanced smartphones, often gifts from wealthier relatives living abroad.[22]

Despite price cuts and occasional promotions, the cost of mobile and internet service is still too high for the majority of Cubans. While the government has cut prices for internet access points, hourly charges still amount to roughly 7-10 percent of the average monthly salary.[23] In December 2016, ETECSA further reduced the hourly charge for using the internet at state-run cybercafés from CUC 2 to 1.50 per hour.[24] This was again lowered from CUC 1.50 to 1 in late October 2017. Likewise, for a much lower fee of CUC 0.60 an hour (lowered to 0.25 and then to 0.10 per hour during the first half of 2017), Cubans are able to access the "intranet," or domestic websites only.[25] The government's strategy seems to be predicated on convincing Cuban exiles to pay for these services for their relatives in Cuba—viewed by many as an attempt to attract new funds. Since January 2014, friends and relatives living abroad can use an online service to pay the phone bills and Nauta internet accounts,

17 https://www.efe.com/efe/english/business/cuba-tests-free-3g-for-mobile-phones-official-start-date-unknown/50000265-3720263

18 https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-internet/communist-run-cuba-starts-rolling-out-internet-on-mobile-phones-idUSKBN1K62U7

19 "Habrá dos tipos de usuarios en el servicio de internet en los móviles, el moderado y el intenso", *14ymedio*, June 8, 2018 (www.14ymedio.com/nacional/usuarios-servicio-internet-moderado-intenso-Etecsa-Cuba-cubanos_0_2451354852.html).

20 "Diputados analizan Política Integral para el Perfeccionamiento de la Informatización de la Sociedad en Cuba," [Delegates analyse Comprehensive Policy for the Improvement of the Computerization of Society in Cuba], *CubaDebate*, July 13, 2017, www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2017/07/13/diputados-analizan-politica-integral-para-el-perfeccionamiento-de-la-informatizacion-de-la-sociedad-en-cuba/#anexo-929649; "Cuban ICT statistics report for 2016," Larry Press, *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), August 2, 2017, laredcubana.blogspot.com/2017/08/cuban-ict-statistics-report-for-2016.html; "Statistics and Predictions from Informatica 2018," Larry Press, *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), March 23, 2018.

21 "Habrá dos tipos de usuarios en el servicio de internet en los móviles, el moderado y el intenso", *14ymedio*, June 8, 2018 (www.14ymedio.com/nacional/usuarios-servicio-internet-moderado-intenso-Etecsa-Cuba-cubanos_0_2451354852.html).

22 Andrea Rodriguez, "Cuba mobile email experiment causes chaos," Associated Press in *Review Journal*, May 16, 2014, http://bit.ly/2cKTGqO

23 Isbel Díaz Torres, "The Mean Salary of Cubans," *Havana Times*, August 6, 2013, http://bit.ly/2cW21x3.

24 "Salas de navegación en Cuba listas para acceso a Internet" [Navegation halls in Cuba ready to Access the internet], *Cubadebate*, June 4, 2013, http://bit.ly/2elWjlt; "Etecsa: llegan rebajas, una nueva bolsa y un experimento de internet," [Etecsa: prices drop, a new 'bolsa,' and an internet experiment], Yurisander Guevara, *Juventud Rebelde*, December 18, 2016, www.juventudrebelde.cu/cuba/2016-12-18/etecsa-llegan-rebajas-una-nueva-bolsa-y-un-experimento-de-internet/

25 "Etecsa baja los precios de internet y del correo Nauta," [Etecsa lowers internet and Nauta e-mail prices], *14ymedio*, December 19, 2016, http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/Etecsa-precios-internet-correo-Nauta_0_2129787012.html; "ETECSA hace oficial la 'comercialización gradual' de internet en los hogares," [ETECSA makes the 'gradual commercialization' of the internet in homes official], *Diario de Cuba*, March 21, 2017, http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1490057659_29795.html; "Etecsa rebaja la tarifa para la navegación nacional," [Etecsa lowers prices for national web access], *14ymedio*, March 30, 2017, http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/etecsa-rebaja-tarifa-navegacion_nacional-descuento_0_2190380945.html

including the newly inaugurated home access program Nauta Hogar, of users living on the island.[26] This will also be the case for those who add cell phone internet data plans in the future.

In early 2008, after a nearly decade-long ban, the government began allowing Cubans to buy personal computers, but prohibitively high costs place computers beyond the reach of most people.[27] While Cuba's population is 11.3 million, in 2016, there were only 1.15 million computers on the island, with just 628,000 having internet connectivity.[28] Phones that use Global Positioning System (GPS) technology or satellite connections are explicitly prohibited by Cuban customs regulations.[29] Additional restrictions are placed on modems, wireless faxes, and satellite dishes, which require special permits to enter the country.[30] These regulations have not completely stopped the entry of such devices into Cuba. In fact, during 2016-2017, the importation and use of NanoStations and other similar technologies that allow users to amplify and share Wi-Fi signals from ETECSA hotspots became increasingly common, allowing many Cubans to gain home or office access to internet long before the government began commercializing it to a tiny group of Old Havana residents in late 2016.[31]

To overcome access limitations, some Cubans have improvised underground networks. Inventive strategies include an island-wide off-line "packet" digital data distribution network, a series of local area networks or sneaker-nets (SNETs) linking up thousands of users in urban areas, and the use of various signal amplification devices such as NanoStations to share or sell Wi-Fi signals.[32] Two popular apps that aid Cubans in sharing are Zapya, which allows for easy wireless sharing of data across two or more devices, and Connectify, which allows users to share a Wi-Fi internet signal with others. Another popular app called Psiphon allows users to create a virtual private network (VPN) that simultaneously protects their anonymity and allows them to connect from a Nauta Wi-Fi hotspot to blocked sites in Cuba such as *Cubanet*, *14ymedio*, or *Diario de Cuba*.[33] Likewise, the app

26 "ETECSA Informa Nuevos Servicios de Pagos por Internet para Cubanos" [ETECSA announces new internet payment services for Cubans], *On Cuba*, January 20, 2014, http://bit.ly/1G77ggd; José Remón, "ETECSA a la carga: Pagando la factura de mi pariente en Cuba" [Payment the bill for my family member in Cuba], *Café Fuerte*, January 22, 2014, http://bit.ly/1R5LPTs; "ETECSA rebaja 50 centavos la hora de conexión a internet y anuncia su experimento de acceso desde los hogares," [ETECSA lowers an hour of internet access by 50 cents and announces its home access experiment], *Diario de Cuba*, December 19, 2016, www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1482149264_27526.html; "ETECSA, internet y el abandono de 'los principios de la revolución'," [ETECSA, internet, and the abandonment of 'the principles of the revolution'], Elías Amor, December 22, 2016, www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1482342010_27594.html
27 Dough Aamoth, "Personal Computers Finally Available in Cuba," *TechCrunch*, May 3, 2008, http://tcrn.ch/1MlKp7n
28 National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI), *"Tecnología de la Información y las Comunicaciones, 2016,"* [Information and Communication Technology, 2016] http://www.onei.cu/aec2016/17%20Tecnologias%20de%20la%20Informacion.pdf; "Cuban ICT statistics report for 2016," Larry Press, *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), August 2, 2017, laredcubana.blogspot.com/2017/08/cuban-ict-statistics-report-for-2016.html
29 Cuban Customs Website (Aduana General de la República de Cuba),"Artículos que necesitan autorización a la importación," [Articles that require authorization for importation], http://bit.ly/1hbJFOl
30 Cuban Customs Website (Aduana General de la República de Cuba), accessed September 14, 2016, http://bit.ly/2cZ8Udg
31 "Redes inalámbricas, la telaraña que envuelve la Isla," [Wireless networks, the web that covers the island], Marcelo Hernández, *14ymedio*, January 4, 2017 www.14ymedio.com/cienciaytecnologia/Redes-inalambricas-telarana-envuelve-Isla_0_2139386046.html; "An innovative street net with Internet access," Larry Press, *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), June 27, 2016, laredcubana.blogspot.com/2016/06/an-innovative-street-net-with-internet.html; "Three generations of Cuban WiFi hotspot sharing," Larry Press, *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), March 7, 2017, laredcubana.blogspot.com/2017/03/three-generations-of-cuban-wifi-hotspot.html
32 "Inside Cuba's D.I.Y. Internet Revolution," Antonio García Martínez, *Wired*, July 26, 2017, https://www.wired.com/2017/07/inside-cubas-diy-internet-revolution/; "Internet llega a los hogares cubanos a pesar de ETECSA" [Internet arrives to Cuban households despite ETECSA], *Cubanet*, June 16, 2016, http://bit.ly/2eFWFqw
33 "Connectify será gratuito en Cuba para compartir el acceso a internet," [Connectify will be free in Cuba for sharing internet access], *14ymedio*, April 6, 2017, www.14ymedio.com/nacional/Connectify-gratuito-Cuba-compartir-internet_0_2194580533.html; "Zapya, la red de los desconectados," [Zapya, the network of the disconnected], Zunilda Mata, *14ymedio*, January 25, 2016, www.14ymedio.com/cienciaytecnologia/Zapya-red-desconectados_0_1932406748.html; "Mamá, estoy chateando por Zapya," [Mom, I'm chatting on Zapya], Zunilda Mata, *14ymedio*, July 21, 2017, www.14ymedio.com/nacional/Mama-chateando-Zapya-Cuba-cubanos-estudiantes_cubanos-escuela_cubana-acoso_en_Cuba_0_2258174167.html; "Conoce 'Psiphon', la app que vence la censura," [Meet 'Psiphon,'

Aurora Suite allows Cuban users to access websites, including blocked ones, by using Nauta's email interface – thus requiring neither a data plan nor an active connection to a Wi-Fi hotspot.[34] The underground economy of internet access also includes account sharing, in which authorized users illegally sell access to those without an official account for CUC 1-2 per hour.

Restrictions on Connectivity

The backbone structure of the internet in Cuba is entirely controlled by the government, and state authorities have the capability and the legal mandate to restrict connectivity at will. At times of heightened political sensitivity, the government has used its complete control of the cell phone network to selectively obstruct citizens' communications. A report published by the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI) in August 2017 found that Skype was the only popular communication tool to be blocked, based on tests conducted between May and mid-June 2017 (see Blocking and Filtering).[35]

ICT Market

The ICT sector remains dominated by government firms. Cuba's monopoly telecommunication service provider ETECSA (Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A.) is owned by the state.[36] Cubacel, a subsidiary of ETECSA, is the only mobile phone carrier.

Following the announcement of a normalization of relations between the United States and Cuba in December 2014, regulatory amendments opened the way for U.S. ICT companies to start offering services to the island. In September 2015, Verizon was the first U.S.-based wireless company to offer roaming in Cuba, quickly followed by Sprint and others.[37] In December 2016, Google reached a deal with ETECSA to allow it to place its servers on the island, with the aim to facilitate access to Google's popular content and free services. While Google's servers will increase the speed and quality of the Cuban internet experience, they will not expand the number of users nor will they lower the price of access.[38]

There is a burgeoning sector of tech start-ups in Cuba that have developed websites and offline mobile phone applications. Leading business directories or "classified" sites include *ConoceCuba*, *Isladentro*, and *AlaMesa* (focusing on private "*paladar*" restaurants). Other popular and innovative start-ups include *Cubazon* (a grassroots Cuban version of Amazon that allows users to order goods for delivery), *Knales* (a data retrieval app that uses SMS messaging allowing its users to gain access to web data), and *Kwelta* (a cultural calendar cum

the app that defeats censorship], Orlando González y Pablo González, *Cubanet*, November 17, 2016, https://www.cubanet.org/destacados/conoce-psiphon-la-app-que-vence-la-censura-a-internet/

[34] "Aurora Suite, la aplicación que burla la censura", *14ymedio*, June 8, 2018, www.14ymedio.com/nacional/Aurora-Suite-aplicacion-burla-censura-Aurora_Suite-app-internet-Cuba_0_2451354849.html.

[35] See: https://ooni.torproject.org/post/cuba-internet-censorship-2017/#skype-blocked

[36] The private firm Telecom Italia previously held shares of ETECSA until February 2011, when the state-owned company Rafin S.A., a financial firm known for its connections to the military, bought Telecom Italia's 27 percent stake for US$706 million. Since then, the telecom company has been completely owned by six Cuban state entities. See: Jerrold Colten, "Telecom Italia Sells Etecsa Stake to Rafin SA For $706 Million," *Bloomberg Business*, January 31, 2011, http://bloom.bg/1YFxlyo

[37] "Competition heats up for roaming, calling services in Cuba," *Miami Herald,* May 10, 2016, http://hrld.us/1qcuP5g

[38] "Google acelerará, pero no expandirá el acceso a internet en Cuba," [Google will accelerate but no expand internet access in Cuba], Zunilda Mata, *14ymedio*, December 13, 2016, www.14ymedio.com/cienciaytecnologia/Google-acelerara-expandira-internet-Cuba_0_2126187369.html; "Google Global Cache entra en Cuba sin un impacto significativo para los usuarios," [Google Global Cache kicks off in Cuba without a significant impact for users], Zunilda Mata, *14ymedio*, April 27, 2017, www.14ymedio.com/nacional/Google-Global-Cache-Cuba-significativo_0_2207179267.html; "Google Global Cache coming to Cuba," Larry Press, *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), December 9, 2016, laredcubana.blogspot.com/2016/12/google-global-cache-coming-to-cuba.html. Brett Perlmutter, Google's representative in Cuba, confirmed the increased speed and reduced latency of Google services in Cuba on July 23, 2017, https://twitter.com/BrettPerlmutter/status/889173036330614786

publicity service).[39] However, on August 1, 2017 the government announced a temporary freeze in the issuance of any new licenses for private computer programmers (along with more than 25 other popular freelancer occupations) until "violations and irregularities" could be brought under control.[40]

These developments come after a period of limited market reforms in Cuba.[41] In November 2013, ETECSA announced that it would allow private workers to market local and long-distance telephone services to the population as self-employed communications agents. The agents may also sell prepaid cards for fixed and mobile telephone services and internet access.[42] The Cuban government also began to allow the limited creation of private cooperatives by computer science graduates in 2012, but tight internet restrictions, along with prohibitively high computer and software pricing, hampered the development of an official market, although a black market for such commodities exists.[43]

Regulatory Bodies

No independent regulatory body for managing the ICT sector exists in Cuba. In 2000, the Ministry of Informatics and Communication (MIC) was created to serve as the regulatory authority for the internet. Within the MIC, the Cuban Supervision and Control Agency oversees the development of internet-related technologies.[44]

[39] AlaMesa: Todo cubierto y servido en un click," [AlaMesa: Everything covered and served in a click], Sayli Sosa Barceló, *Invasor*, June 10, 2017, www.invasor.cu/es/sociedad/13813-a-la-mesa-todo-cubierto-y-servido-en-un-click; "TechCrunch panel -- three Cuban software companies," Larry Press, *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), May 30, 2017, laredcubana.blogspot.com/2017/05/techcrunch-panel-three-cuban-companies.html; "Los emprendedores cubanos, a la espera de un 'punto de inflexión' en internet," *14ymedio*, May 15, 2017, www.14ymedio.com/nacional/emprendedores-cubanos-espera-inflexion-internet_0_2217978194.html
[40] "Trabajo por Cuenta Propia: Por la ruta de la actualización," [Self-Employment: On the Route to Updating], Yaima Puig Meneses, *Granma*, August 1, 2017, www.granma.cu/cuba/2017-08-01/por-la-ruta-de-la-actualizacion-01-08-2017-00-08-07; Gaceta Oficial, No. 31 Extraordinaria, Resolución No. 22/2017 (GOC-2017-506-EX31), sobre trabajo por cuenta propia, [Resolution No. 22/2017 about self-employment], August 1, 2017, http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/GOC-2017-EX31_CYMFIL20170801_0001.pdf
[41] Nick Miroff, "Cuba is Reforming, but Wealth and Success are Still Frowned Upon," *Business Insider*, September 4, 2012, http://read.bi/1OX6fPk
[42] "Communication agents will see telephone and Internet time," *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), November 27, 2013, http://bit.ly/1G7d5dB
[43] "Se Buscan Socios," *Juventud Rebelde*, December 15, 2012, http://bit.ly/2cUAN73
[44] For the website of The Ministry of Informatics and Communications, see: http://www.mincom.gob.cu/

Limits on Content

Cuban law places strict limits on free speech and outlaws independent media. Although many foreign news websites are accessible from internet access points, websites focused on Cuban news and websites run by Cuban dissidents are often blocked. Despite connectivity limitations, Cubans have been able to access content through improvisational underground networks and USB flash drives containing content downloaded from the internet. Several independent web-based information sites have also emerged, offering alternative discourses about the Cuban reality.

Blocking and Filtering

Rather than relying on the technically sophisticated filtering and blocking used by other repressive regimes, the Cuban government continues to limit users' access to information primarily by making technology unavailable and by imposing prohibitive costs. Social-networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter may be accessed—with consistent monitoring and varying reliability—from Wi-Fi hotspots, some cybercafés, and hotels. While Skype is blocked, alternative apps such as IMO have become a popular way to video chat with relatives abroad.[45]

The websites of foreign news outlets—including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *El País*, the *Financial Times,* and *El Nuevo Herald* (a Miami-based Spanish-language daily with ample coverage of Cuba)— are accessible in Cuba. However, ETECSA commonly blocks dissident or independent news outlets and several sites of Cuban activists and dissident organizations. In February 2018, the independent online outlet *El Estornudo* reported it was blocked in Cuba.[46] In response, the magazine published an editorial against the decision, stating that it "will not modify the editorial line of our magazine by an ounce nor will it make *El Estornudo* dialogue with the political power on the terms that the political power expects."[47] This message was reposted in solidarity by other local independent digital media.[48]

A recent report by the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI) confirmed ETECSA's blocking of 41 websites, based on tests conducted on 1,458 websites from eight locations between May 29 and June 10, 2017. Blocked sites included news outlets and blogs such as *Cuba Encuentro* and *Martí Noticias*, those focusing on human rights issues such as the site of the "Ladies in White" movement led by relatives of jailed dissidents, and several anonymity and circumvention tools such as Anonymouse. Freedom House was also among the human rights sites blocked. According to OONI's analysis, ETECSA appeared to be blocking the HTTP version of the websites, which could potentially enable users to access these sites over HTTPS.[49]

In 2016, a series of tests conducted by *14ymedio* found that ETECSA's cellphone network, Cubacel, has been systematically filtering domestic SMS containing specific words, such as "*democracia*" (democracy), "*dictadura*" (dictatorship), and "*derechos humanos*" (human rights). This strategy blocks all messages containing the key words on all devices sent or received both by known activists and other uninvolved users. Text messages

[45] "The Cuban Internet: Letter from Havana," *Foreign Affairs,* April 19, 2016, http://fam.ag/2cV544o; see also: Sayli Sosa, "IMO in Cuba: Shortening Distances Between Relatives," *Havana Times*, July 30, 2015, http://bit.ly/2e7qezq

[46] "Cuban online magazine El Estornudo reports it is blocked on the island," Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, February 28, 2018, https://knightcenter.utexas.edu/blog/00-19343-cuban-online-magazine-el-estornudo-reports-it-blocked-island

[47] "Nota al Censor: ¿Por qué no puede leerse El Estornudo en Cuba?" [Note to the Censor: Why can't El Estornudo be read in Cuba?], *El Estornudo,* February 26, 2018, https://www.revistaelestornudo.com/nota-al-censor-no-puede-leerse-estornudo-cuba/

[48] Laura Vidal and Ellery Roberts Biddle, "Censored, But Not Backing Down: Cuban News Site Staff Say They Won't Change Their Editorial Line," Global Voices (blog), February 27, 2018, https://globalvoices.org/2018/02/27/censored-but-not-backing-down-cuban-news-site-staff-say-they-wont-change-their-editorial-line/

[49] Maria Xynou, Arturo Filastò, Simone Basso, "Measuring Internet Censorship in Cuba's ParkNets," OONI, August 28, 2017, https://ooni.torproject.org/post/cuba-internet-censorship-2017/

received from abroad containing such terms are also blocked, while outgoing international texts are unimpeded. In all cases, users are charged for the unsent messages and never notified of the blocking.[50]

Blocking may occur not only at the national level but also at the level of various intranet networks. In March 2015, the Nauta intranet banned Larry Press' blog, *The Internet in Cuba*, one of the best sources about Cuban ICTs. However, reports from 2018 indicate that it has since become available again from public access hotspots.[51] In January 2015, the University of Computer Sciences (UCI) banned Fernando Ravsberg's blog *Cartas desde Cuba*, which had been hosted on the *BBC Mundo* platform from 2008 to 2013 until becoming independent.[52]

Content Removal

While ETECSA does not proactively police networks and delete content, several blogs hosted on the government-sponsored blog platform *Reflejos* have faced censorship by its moderators.[53] In April 2017, for example, a technology blog called TuAndroid was temporarily suspended and an article that criticized new top-up deals offered by ETECSA was removed.[54] Another takedown in February 2016 concerned a blog on sexual diversity called "*Proyecto Arcoiris*" (Rainbow Project).[55]

After launching her independent digital newspaper *14ymedio*, Yoani Sánchez tested the tolerance of the *Reflejos* blogging platform by posting articles from the newspaper there. However, her posts there was also removed permanently in March 2015. Although the government denied that they prohibited certain topics on the platform and maintained that it was open to all Cuban users, it required bloggers to register with information cards and prohibited the publication of unlawful or counter-revolutionary content.[56]

The vague wording of certain government provisions regarding content regulation allows the government to censor a wide array of posts without judicial oversight. Resolution 56/1999 stipulates that all materials intended for publication or dissemination on the internet must first be approved by the National Registry of Serial Publications.[57] Meanwhile, Resolution 179 (2008) authorizes ETECSA to "take the necessary steps to prevent access to sites whose contents are contrary to social interests, ethics and morals, as well as the use of applications that affect the integrity or security of the state."[58]

Media, Diversity, and Content Manipulation

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[50] "Cubacel censura los SMS con las palabras 'democracia' o 'huelga de hambre,'" [Cubacel censors SMS with the words "democracy" and "hunger strike"], Yoani Sánchez and Reinaldo Escobar, *14ymedio*, September 3, 2016, http://bit.ly/2bS1VE2; "Lista de frases y terminos bloqueados por Cubacel," [List of phrases and terms blocked by Cubacel], *14ymedio*, September 3, 2016, http://www.14ymedio.com/reportajes/Lista-frases-terminos-bloqueados-Cubacel_0_2064993491.html; "Netizen Report: In Cuba, Text Messages With Controversial Content Are Disappearing," *Global Voices*, September 15, 2016, https://globalvoices.org/2016/09/15/netizen-report-in-cuba-text-messages-with-controversial-content-are-disappearing/

[51] "If you are reading this, you are probably not in Cuba," *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), March 30, 2015, http://bit.ly/1Wnebvj

[52] Fernando Ravsberg, "La UCI censura 'Cartas desde Cuba,'" *Cartas Desde Cuba* (blog), January 29, 2015, http://bit.ly/1Kzr3t5; See also Cuba Red, "Otra censura. Fernando Rasverg. Increible," posted by elapap, February 2, 2015, http://bit.ly/2d4rMf5

[53] María Matienzo Puerto, "Guerra contra las subculturas en la plataforma 'Reflejos'" [War against the subcultures on the plaform Reflejos], *Diario de Cuba*, June 20, 2016, http://bit.ly/2d6Lfrh; See also: "Censura en Cuba se cobra otra víctima en la plataforma bloguera," [Censorship in Cuba claims another victim on blogging platform], *Cibercuba*, May 3, 2016, http://bit.ly/2cIgd7V

[54] "TuAndroid vuelve a publicar tras una semana de 'castigo' oficialista," *Cubanet,* April 20, 2017, https://www.cubanet.org/tecnologia-2/tuandroid-vuelve-publicar-tras-una-semana-de-castigo-oficialista/

[55] "An LGBT Blog Is Suspended Over Mention of Cuba's 1960s-Era Labor Camps," *Global Voices*, February 11, 2016, http://bit.ly/2d6KIG0

[56] *14ymedio*, "Web Platform Reflejos Closes the '14ymedio' Blog," *Translating Cuba*, March 27, 2015, http://bit.ly/1QD7dhM

[57] Ministerio de Cultura, Resolución No. 56/99, *Las Publicaciones Seriadas Cubanas*, http://bit.ly/2cIwMlL

[58] Resolution 179 (2008), http://bit.ly/2cAH6wF

Cuba has one of the most restrictive media environments in the world. The constitution prohibits privately-owned media, and restricts speech that does not "conform to the aims of a socialist society." The government closely monitors users who post or access political information online and delivers harsh penalties to those it perceives as dissidents. Demand for access to content among the Cuban population, however, has led to elaborate underground networks of internet access.

The cost of access to technologies that facilitate information sharing continues to be high, and the Cuban government has pursued individuals who violate telecommunications access laws. Nonetheless, many Cubans find ways to access restricted content, and a vibrant community of bloggers in Cuba utilizes the medium to report on conditions within the country. Cubans are often able to break through infrastructural blockages by building their own antennas, using illegal dial-up connections, or developing blogs on foreign platforms. There is also a thriving improvisational system of "sneakernets," in which USB flash drives and data discs are used to distribute materials (articles, prohibited photos, satirical cartoons, video clips) that have been downloaded from the internet or stolen from government offices.[59] The "*Paquete Semanal*" ("Weekly Package") has become a popular offline alternative for accessing music, movies, TV series, mobile phone apps, magazines, and classifieds.[60] However, given the routine self-censorship practiced by the compilers of the *paquete*, some users feel it has become too "tame" in its avoidance of hot political topics. As a result, a more strictly clandestine alternative has appeared in recent years calling itself "*El paketito*" ("The little packet"), which attempts to fill the gaps left by the more mainstream packet. The Cuban government has also joined this battle over alternative digital media with the state-sponsored Youth Computer Clubs (JCC) producing its own digital compendium of material originally known as "*El Maletín*" ("The briefcase") and more recently "*La Mochila*" ("The backpack").[61]

Despite severe censorship in official media, some journalists have started using the internet to disseminate content that the official press is reluctant to publish. In May 2014, Yoani Sánchez launched an independent online news site, *14ymedio*. Although the site is blocked in Cuba, the editorial team is able to post content by emailing it to friends abroad. Cubans on the island can also subscribe to a weekly e-mail digest of the digital newspaper, which is much more difficult to block. (This strategy is also used by *Diario de Cuba*, among many other independent digital platforms). Users also access content from the site through proxies, using a VPN app on their cell phone, and offline versions that are shared via USB flash drives.[62] While the government policy on political content is still very restrictive, there has been a recent surge in the number of independent digital media sites produced by increasingly professional Cuban teams on the island – often working in concert with collaborators abroad. Not all consider themselves dissident operations but most struggle to survive between the government's open repression and the lack of a legal framework that would protect them. For example, sites such as *Periodismo de Barrio* and *El Estornudo* produce critical investigative journalism, while others such as *El Toque, Cachivache Media* (which ceased operations in August 2017), *Vistar Magazine, Garbos, Play-Off,* and *OnCuba* report on a wide variety of topics, including entertainment, sports, fashion, and culture, while expressing a cross-section of views on social issues.[63]

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[59] Jonathan Watts, "Cuba's 'offline internet': no access, no power, no problem," *The Guardian*, December 23, 2014, http://gu.com/p/44dcf/stw; See also: Emilio San Pedro, "Cuban internet delivered weekly by hand," *BBC*, August 10, 2015, http://bbc.in/1TjpO8x; Jack Karsten and Darrel M. West, "Cuba slowly expands Internet access," *Tech Tank* (blog), Brookings Institute, July 2, 2015, http://brook.gs/1KDrxLF

[60] "Cuban internet delivered weekly by hand," *BBC News,* August 10, 2015, http://bbc.in/1TjpO8x

[61] Luz Escobar, "El 'paketito,' un rival clandestino para el 'paquete,'" [The 'paketito,' a clandestine rival for the 'paquete'], *14ymedio*, May 5, 2017, www.14ymedio.com/cienciaytecnologia/paketito-rival-clandestino-paquete_0_2211978784.html

[62] Tiffany Pham, "How She Did It: Yoani Sánchez Launches Cuban News Outlet *14ymedio*," *Forbes*, November 30, 2014, http://onforb.es/1yz5eDp

[63] Ted A. Henken, "Cuba's Digital Millennials: Independent Digital Media and Civil Society on the Island of the Disconnected," *Social Research*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (Summer 2017), www.socres.org/single-post/2017/06/26/Vol-84-No-2-Summer-2017; Daniel Wizenberg, "New Cuban journalism emerges on the internet, beyond the official and opposition media," *Journalism in the Americas (blog)*, July 20, 2016, http://bit.ly/29Zw3tO; See also: "Millennials lead private media opening in Communist-run Cuba," *Reuters,* September 16, 2016, http://reut.rs/2cvgQnk; "Connecting Cuba: More Space for Criticism but Restrictions Slow Press Freedom Progress," Committee to Protect Journalists, September 2016, https://cpj.org/reports/2016/09/connecting-cuba-internet-bloggers-press-freedom-criticism.php; Cuba's Parallel Worlds: Digital Media Crosses the Divide," Anne Nelson, Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), August 30, 2016,

A January 2018 report on the threats and opportunities faced by 14 of Cuba's new independent media outlets found that only 41 percent succeed in having Cubans living on the island as their main source of traffic. It is more common for readers to connect from the unofficial capital of the Cuban diaspora in Miami. The sites vary widely in popularity, with readership ranging from as few as 4,000 to as many as 4 million unique users each month. All the sites have reporters based in Havana, while half also have correspondents located abroad. Still, island readers tend to increasingly use their mobile devices, as well Facebook's Instant Articles application, to connect to these sites. While the thematic focus of the sites varies from sports to fashion to technology to politics, they all share a common experience of having received threats and harassment from state officials. They share a tenuous "allegal" status between oblique toleration and open repression. Still, despite their clear limitations, the report argues that these independent journalism sites have been both innovative and impactful by covering issues omitted in the official press, experimenting with new genres and formats, diversifying content distribution spaces, establishing alliances with other national and international media, and winning awards, recognition, and sometimes financial support from a variety of international journalism organizations.[64]

The government has tried to direct popular demand for videos, games, and online social networking to government-controlled platforms. Following in the footsteps of other repressive regimes contending with a highly literate and digitally interested audience, the government launched its own copycat versions of popular websites such as Wikipedia, Twitter, and Facebook. This allows the government to direct citizens to closely monitored, censored versions of these platforms. In 2010, the government launched Ecured, a copycat version of Wikipedia,[65] and in 2013 they launched the social networking site *La Tendedera*, which is accessible from youth centers.[66] In March 2015, the government launched the blogging platform *Reflejos*, where content can only be published from a Cuban IP address.[67]

Networks of pro-government journalists have also disseminated content online to counter alternative discourses about Cuban reality. A report on digital journalism published by *Fundación Telefónica* noted that Cuban authorities have activated "defense mechanisms" online, by accusing critical and independent sites of perpetrating a constant media campaign against the island. Such a narrative "converts independent voices into 'mercenaries' or traitors, with the ultimate objective of criminalizing dissent."[68] More recently, the Cuban Democratic Directorate found that "dozens" of fake accounts were campaigning in favor of the government in the midst of parliamentary and provincial elections in 2018.[69]

Digital Activism

Although Cuba continues to have very low internet penetration, the use of popular social media sites like Facebook and YouTube is rapidly increasing, as mobile devices and Wi-Fi hotspots become more common. Still, the vast majority of users access these sites for personal and non-political ends, pointedly avoiding controversial topics or political activism. Thus, Cubans have not been able to organize large-scale campaigns around political objectives. Available at Wi-Fi hotspots, Facebook has become a popular platform for social

http://www.cima.ned.org/publication/cubas-parallel-worlds-digital-media-crosses-divide/; Sociedad Interamericana de la Prensa (SIP), [Inter-American Press Society], Cuba Annual Report, Yoani Sánchez, October 13, 2016, www.sipiapa.org/notas/1210773-cuba

[64] Elaine Díaz, "Cuba's Emerging Media: Challenges, Threats, and Opportunities," International Journalists' Network, January 29, 2018, https://ijnet.org/en/blog/cuba%E2%80%99s-emerging-media-challenges-threats-and-opportunities.

[65] "Ecured is Not Open like Wikipedia," *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), December 21, 2011, http://bit.ly/1FyuMI7.

[66] "Una Tendedera para interconectarnos," Rouslyn Navia Jordán, *Juventud Rebelde*, December 3, 2014, http://bit.ly/1YFFfbl

[67] Dirección de Comunicación Institucional Joven Club, "La plataforma de blog 'Reflejos' tuvo hoy su lanzamiento oficial en el Palacio Central" [Reflejos blog platform officially launched today at the Central Palace], news release, Ministry of Communications, March 18, 2015, http://bit.ly/1NRxREB

[68] Ramón Salaverría ed., "Ciberperiodismo en Iberoamérica," *Fundación Telefónica*, February 2016, http://bit.ly/1ZZQE5i

[69] Orlando Gutierrez and Augusto Hernandez, "Cuba's Fake Tweets," Cuban Studies Institute, March 16, 2018, https://www.cubacenter.org/articles-and-events/2018/3/16/cuba-insight-cubas-fake-tweets

networking, while other platforms such as Twitter are less widely used.[70]

Political activists seeking to raise further awareness via social media have encountered government clampdowns. Cuban activists inside and outside Cuba launched the campaign #TodosMarchamos (We All March) in mid-2015 to denounce human rights violations on the island and recurring repression against the "Ladies in White," a dissident group that protests against the Cuban government every Sunday.[71]

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[70] A survey conducted by Ding found that 95 percent of users go on Facebook for social purposes at local Wi-Fi hotspots: "New survey finds 70% of Cuban internet users use local Wi-Fi hotspots every week," *Ding,* June 7, 2016, http://bit.ly/2cInNiz
[71] "Activistas organizan un 'tuitazo' para denunciar la represión del régimen," [Activists organize a Twitter campaign to denounce the regime's repression], *Diario de Cuba*, May 30, 2015, http://bit.ly/2d9o0zZ

Violations of User Rights

Cuba outlaws a wide range of speech deemed to be counter-revolutionary or a threat to the public order. In recent years, the Cuban government has moved from issuing long, multi-year sentences to using short-term detentions as a means of harassing independent journalists and bloggers. Several episodes of censorship and intimidation against bloggers and independent journalists were reported during this coverage period.

Legal Environment

The Cuban legal structure is not favorable to internet freedom. The constitution explicitly subordinates freedom of speech to the objectives of a socialist society, and freedom of cultural expression is guaranteed only if such expression is not contrary to "the revolution."[72] The penal code (Law 62, Fifth Section) sets penalties ranging from a few months to 20 years in prison for any activity considered to be a threat to the Cuban state or public order, including a provision that authorizes the state to detain, reeducate, or monitor anyone who shows a "proclivity to commit crime" by violating the norms of the socialist society.[73] Meanwhile, the Law to Protect Cuba's National Independence and Economy (Law 88), passed in 1999, punishes any activity that threatens Cuban sovereignty or facilitates the U.S. blockade. Anyone who passes information to the U.S. government that could bolster the embargo can face up to 15 years in prison. Spreading subversive materials can incur a penalty of three to eight years in prison, while collaborating with foreign media outlets is punishable by up to five years in prison. [74]

In 1996, the government passed Decree-Law 209, which states that the internet cannot be used "in violation of Cuban society's moral principles or the country's laws," and that email messages must not "jeopardize national security."[75] In 2007, a network security measure, Resolution 127, banned the use of public data-transmission networks to spread information that is against the social interest, norms of good behavior, the integrity of people, or national security. The decree requires access providers to install controls that enable them to detect and prevent the proscribed activities, and to report them to the relevant authorities.[76] Furthermore, access to the internet in Cuba generally requires complete identification, rendering anonymity nearly impossible.[77]

Prosecutions and Detentions for Online Activities

Under Raúl Castro, the Cuban government shifted its repressive tactics from long-term imprisonment of independent journalists to short-term detentions, interrogations, and legal harassment.[78] Short-term arrests and detentions of activists tend to increase surrounding key political and social events, and bloggers and online activists are often caught up in such crackdowns. Because it is difficult to distinguish between independent journalists and political activists in Cuba, however, it is often impossible to accurately pinpoint whether detentions were in retaliation for online speech specifically. In June 2017, the CCDHRN reported that, while 2017 had seen fewer detentions than in past years, physical attacks against activists had increased. Recent reports indicate that there were 9,940 politically motivated detentions in 2016 and 5,155 in 2017.[79]

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[72] Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 1992, art. 53 and 39(d), accessed September 1, 2015, http://bit.ly/2cIwwTN

[73] Código Penal [Penal Code], art. 72 and 91, http://bit.ly/2cIwwTN

[74] Committee to Protect Journalists, "International Guarantees and Cuban Law," trans. María Salazar, March 1, 2008, http://bit.ly/1hbJO4p

[75] Reporters Without Borders, "Going Online in Cuba: Internet under Surveillance," October 2006, http://bit.ly/1f4pnF0; See also Decreto 209 (Decree 209), September 13, 1996, http://bit.ly/1VdG1Nk

[76] Giovanni Ziccardi, *Resistance, Liberation Technology, and Human Rights in the Digital Age*, (Netherlands, Springer, 2013) 220.

[77] Isbel Diaz Torres, "Wi-Fi for Cubans and Mobile E-Mail Service," *Havana Times*, March 10, 2014, http://bit.ly/1G7q7b7

[78] Human Rights Watch, "Cuba," in *World Report 2016*, accessed September 18, 2016, http://bit.ly/1ZNmEc1; See also: Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *After the Black Spring, Cuba's New Repression*, July 6, 2011, https://cpj.org/x/4472

[79] "Menos detenciones y más agresiones físicas contra activistas, denuncia la CCDHRN," [Fewer detentions and more physical attacks against activists denounces CCDHRN], *14ymedio*, June 5, 2017 www.14ymedio.com/nacional/detenciones-agresiones-activistas-denuncia-

Independent digital media organizations and their correspondents have experienced firings, detentions, harassment, and legal proceedings. Among the trumped-up offenses, several independent journalists have faced prosecution for "usurpation of legal capacity" under Article 149 of the Penal Code, which prohibits "carrying out acts belonging to a profession the exercise of which one is not duly prepared":

Such was the case of Sol García Basulto, a journalist for digital magazine *La Hora de Cuba* and correspondent for the news website *14ymedio,* who was placed under house arrest in July 2017 after being accused of "usurpation of legal capacity" along with fellow journalist Henry Constantín Ferreiro, also of *La Hora de Cuba*.[80] In January 2018, Iris Mariño was the third journalist working for *La Hora de Cuba* to be accused of "usurpation of legal capacity."[81]

In September 2017, Maykel González Vivero of *Diario de Cuba* and Carlos Alejandro Rodríguez of *Periodismo de Barrio* were detained for several hours when attempting to cover hurricane Irma.[82] An LGBT activist, González was previously fired from his job at a state radio station in September 2016 for working part-time for non-state media outlets *Diario de Cuba* and *El Estornudo*. Then, the following month he attempted to cover the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew in Baracoa but was detained for three days, deported back home, and charged with "illicit economic activity" for attempting to work independently in a disaster zone without accreditation.[83]

In March 2018, Ileana Hernández, an independent internet activist and producer of the digital show "Lente Cubano" (Cuban Lens), was issued an official warning ("advertencia") about her activism. She was declared a "person of police interest" and told that she was under surveillance to check if she exhibited a good social and moral conduct." She was also prevented from traveling abroad despite having no criminal record.[84] She was reportedly detained after announcing she would file a collective complaint to denounce restrictions on the freedom of movement.[85]

Surveillance, Privacy, and Anonymity

Surveillance of ICTs in Cuba is widespread, and dissident bloggers are subject to punishments ranging from fines and searches to confiscation of equipment and detentions. Anonymity and encryption technologies are strictly prohibited in Cuba,[86] and web access points, such as Wi-Fi hotspots, cybercafés and access centers, are

CCDHRN_0_2230576927.html; Cuba amplía la censura a internet y persiste el acoso y la dentención de opositores," *14ymedio*, February 22, 2018.

[80] "La policía de Camagüey prohíbe a Sol García Basulto y Henry Constantín el ejercicio del periodismo," [Camagüey police prohibit Sol García Basulto and Henry Constantín from the exercise of journalism], *14ymedio*, May 4, 2017, http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/Camaguey-Sol-Garcia-Henry-Constantin_0_2211378851.html; "La policía impone 'prisión domiciliaria' a la Periodista Sol García Basulto," [The police impose 'house arrest' against the journalist Sol García Basulto], *14ymedio*, July 2017, http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/domiciliaria-periodista-Sol-Garcia-Basulto_0_2259973990.html

[81] "Periodista independiente, acusada de "usurpación de capacidad legal"" [Independent journalist accused of usurpation of legal capacity], *Cubanet,* January 30, 2018, https://www.cubanet.org/noticias/periodista-independiente-cubana-acusada-de-usurpacion-de-capacidad-legal/

[82] "Detienen a dos periodistas en Cuba que intentaban reportar sobre huracán Irma" [Two journalists detained while trying to report on hurricane Irma] *Martí Noticias,* September 7, 2017, https://www.martinoticias.com/a/cuba-detienen-periodistas-intentaban-reportar-huracan-irma/152404.html

[83] "Cuban Journalist and LGBT Activist Sacked for Working With Non-State Media," *Global Voices*, September 6, 2016, https://globalvoices.org/2016/09/06/cuban-journalist-and-lgbt-activist-sacked-for-working-with-non-state-media/; Ted A. Henken, "Cuban "Cuba's Digital Millennials: Independent Digital Media and Civil Society on the Island of the Disconnected," *Social Research*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (Summer 2017), www.socres.org/single-post/2017/06/26/Vol-84-No-2-Summer-2017

[84] "Las autoridades declaran a Iliana Hernández 'persona de interés policial'," *14ymedio*, March 19, 2018. http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/autoridades-declaran-Iliana-Hernandez-policial_0_2402759704.html

[85] "Detienen a periodista cubana por demandar devolución de pasaje tras prohibición de viajar," *Martí Noticias*, March 27, 2018, https://www.martinoticias.com/a/cuba-detienen-periodista-demandar-devolucion-pasaje-prohibicion-viajar/169568.html

[86] According to the Cuban Mission to the United Nations, encryption is only permissible if authorized by the Ministry of Communications and the Ministry of the Interior. Letter from the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the ONU to the High Commission on Human Rights, 2015, República de Cuba Misión Permanente ante la Oficina de las Naciones Unidas en Ginebra y los Organismos Internacionales con sede en Suiza, "Nota No. 211/2015," [Note No. 211/2015], http://bit.ly/1JtNsUE; See also: Rolando Cartaya, "Crítica Relator de ONU Control a Cifrado de Datos Personales en Cuba," [UN Official Criticizes the Control of Encryption of Personal Data in Cuba], *MartiNoticias*, June 24, 2015, http://bit.ly/1R5ZzgY

closely monitored and users are required to register with their identification information.[87]

Despite constitutional provisions that protect various forms of communication and portions of the penal code that establish penalties for the violation of the secrecy of communications, users' privacy is frequently violated. Tools for content surveillance are likewise pervasive. Under Resolution 179/2008, ISPs are required to register and retain the addresses of all traffic for at least one year.[88] Reports indicate that the government routes most connections through proxy servers and is able to obtain user names and passwords through special monitoring software called Avila Link, which is installed at most ETECSA and public access points.[89] In addition, delivery of email messages is consistently delayed, and it is not unusual for a message to arrive censored or without its attachments.

A decree from the Ministry of Communications reaffirmed the government's continued monitoring of internet traffic, stating that ETECSA will immediately end a user's access if he or she commits "any violation of the norms of ethical behavior promoted by the Cuban state."[90] Users must show their national ID cards and sign an agreement stating that they will not use the service for anything "that could be considered …damaging or harmful to public security"—a vague term that could presumably extend to political dissent.[91]

If users attempt to send an email with attachments, ETECSA's own NAUTA interface system greets them with a pop-up window reminding them that "other people may see what you are sending" and asking if they wish to continue. Although the pop-up window is marked "Internet Explorer" and appears to be a real message generated by the search engine, several Cuban online users have said that they had never seen such a message when using internet cafés in Havana's tourist hotels. Such claims suggest that ETECSA may have programmed computers at its new access points to prompt users as a reminder that the government is monitoring their online activities.

Intimidation and Violence

Although the majority of cases of physical violence against activists in Cuba appear to be in retaliation for public protests rather than online activity, prominent online users have faced violence from police forces, and users who have been jailed for extended periods of time report being mistreated and tortured.

Journalists working for emerging non-state media have in turn suffered from systematic threats and harassment, including interrogations, smear campaigns, and confiscation of equipment. In January 2018, *14ymedio* journalist Luz Escobar reported that officers of state security threatened to prosecute her and prevent her from leaving the country.[92] Harold Cárdenas, an editor of the blog *La Joven Cuba*, was reportedly targeted by online smear campaigns, especially conducted by anonymous users.[93]

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[87] Ellery Roberts Biddle, *Rationing the Digital: The Policy and Politics of Internet Use in Cuba Today*, July 2013, Internet Monitor (The Berkman Center for Internet & Society), http://bit.ly/1LCRoID; Isbel Diaz Torres, "Wi-Fi for Cubans and Mobile E-Mail Service," *Havana Times*, March 10, 2014, http://bit.ly/1G7q7b7; Yoani Sánchez, "Unos días con Nauta," [A few day with Nauta], *14ymedio* (blog), March 24, 2015, http://bit.ly/1G7q7b7

[88] José Cuervo, "Resolución n° 179/2008 Proveedores de servicios de acceso a Internet al público," [Resolution No. 179/2008 Providers of services of internet access to the public], *Informática jurídica*, February 16, 2015, http://bit.ly/1PC8Vjg.

[89] Lorenzo Franseschi-Bicchiera, "The Internet in Cuba: 5 Things You Need to Know," *Mashable*, April 3, 2014, http://on.mash.to/1Fmi1Rg /; Infosurgents: Tracking the Information Revolution, "Internet Filtering," University of Michigan, http://bit.ly/1KHrM9m; "Cuba: Long live freedom (but not for the Internet)!" *Reporters without Borders*, November 3, 2014, https://12mars.rsf.org/2014-en/2014/03/11/cuba-long-live-freedom-but-not-for-the-internet/#more-91

[90] Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba Ministerio de Justicia, Resolución No. 197/2013, http://bit.ly/2cAsf92

[91] Ibid.

[92] "Te vamos a estar vigilando," *14ymedio,* January 16, 2018, http://www.14ymedio.com/nacional/vamos-vigilando_0_2365563425.html

[93] Elaine Díaz Rodríguez, "Cuba's emerging media: challenges, threats and opportunities," Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas (blog), January 29, 2018, https://knightcenter.utexas.edu/blog/00-19236-cuba%E2%80%99s-emerging-media-challenges-threats-and-opportunities

Technical Attacks

Technical attacks do not appear to be a primary method of censorship in the country, but have been targeted at some online outlets.[94] In June 2017, the youth leader of the Patriotic Union of Cuba, Carlos Amel Oliva, denounced that several Facebook accounts belonging to the opposition had been hacked. He reported that hackers had published a fake post on his profile announcing his supposed resignation from the Patriotic Union of Cuba due to internal problems within the dissident organization.[95]

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[94] Associated Press, "'Hackeado' portal digital de la bloguera cubana Yoani Sánchez," [The digital portal of Cuban blogger Yoani Sánchez 'hacked'], *Miami Diario*, May 21, 2015, http://bit.ly/1R6cway; See also: Amnesty International, "Cuba," *Amnesty International Report 2014/15*, http://bit.ly/1Bm8EI5

[95] "Denuncian ataque cibernético a opositores cubanos," https://www.martinoticias.com/a/denuncian-ataque-cibernetico-opositores-cubanos/146670.html