

PRO:

Source: [cuba-embargo.procon.org](http://cuba-embargo.procon.org)

**1) The United States should maintain the Cuba embargo because Cuba has not met the conditions required to lift it.** Proclamation 3447 signed by President Kennedy on Feb. 3, 1962, established the embargo against Cuba to reduce "the threat posed by its alignment with the communist powers." The embargo was strengthened by the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act, and the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act of 1996 (also known as Helms-Burton) which specified conditions for terminating the embargo. According to US law, Cuba must legalize all political activity, release all political prisoners, commit to free and fair elections in the transition to representative democracy, grant freedom to the press, respect internationally recognized human rights, and allow labor unions. Since Cuba has not met these conditions, the embargo should not be lifted.

**2) Ending the embargo before the Cuban government meets the conditions specified by US law would make the United States look weak.** Lifting the sanctions unilaterally would be an act of appeasement that could embolden Cuba to join forces with other countries such as Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, China, and Iran to promote anti-American sentiments or socialism in the Western Hemisphere. The United States should not risk sending the message that it can be waited out or that seizing US property in foreign countries, as Castro did in Cuba when he took power, will be tolerated.

**3) The Cuban government has consistently responded to US attempts to soften the embargo with acts of aggression, raising concerns about what would happen if the sanctions were fully lifted.** President Carter tried to normalize relations with Cuba by opening the US Interests Section (a de facto embassy) in Havana in 1977. Fidel Castro then orchestrated the Mariel Boatlift, which sent 125,000 emigrants (including criminals and mentally ill people) to the United States. In 2003, President George W. Bush began to ease restrictions for visiting family members in Cuba, but tightened the rules in 2004 in response to Cuba's crackdown against political dissidents. President Obama relaxed the US travel policy in 2009 to allow unlimited travel to Cuba to visit family members. That same year, the Cuban government arrested an American aid worker and sentenced him to 15 years in prison.

**4) The embargo enables the United States to apply pressure on the Cuban government to improve human rights.** Several international organizations have written about the long history of human rights abuses and repression in Cuba. At least 4,123 people were detained for political reasons in 2011, and an estimated 6,602 political detentions occurred in 2012. The Congressional Research Service reported that there are an estimated 65,000 to 70,000 prisoners incarcerated in Cuba as of May 2012 (although the Cuban government reports 57,337 prisoners) - among the highest in the world on a *per capita* basis. The freedom of expression and right to assemble are severely restricted by the government. The 1996 Helms-Burton Act stated that the United States has a "moral obligation" to promote human rights in keeping with the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the embargo is a bargaining tool.

**5) Since there is virtually no private sector in Cuba, opening trade would only help the government, not regular Cuban citizens.** The 90% state-owned economy ensures that the Cuban government and military would reap the gains of open trade with the United States, not private citizens. Foreign companies operating in Cuba are required to hire workers through the state; wages are converted into local currency and devalued at a ratio of 24:1, so a \$500 wage becomes a \$21 paycheck. A Cuban worker was quoted as having said, "In Cuba, it's a great myth that we live off the state. In fact, it's the state that lives off of us."

**6) The United States is able to target the Cuban government with its embargo while still providing assistance to Cuban citizens.** US policy allows people to visit family members and send money to relatives in Cuba, and also permits travel for humanitarian and educational reasons. Over one billion dollars in remittances (money transferred from abroad) are sent to Cuban families each year, mostly from relatives in the United States. Congress has given USAID a total budget of \$197 million between 2001 and 2012 to promote democracy and human rights in Cuba.

**7) The uncertainty over who will succeed Raúl Castro makes it unwise for the United States to change its policy before a new leader is in place.** An aging Fidel Castro yielded power to his younger brother Raúl for health reasons, but Raúl is also over 80 years old and there are questions about how much longer the Castros will remain in charge of Cuba. John Hughes, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and former President of the American Society of Newspapers, stated: "The worst scenario would be the emergence of an Army strongman who plunges the country into martial rule." The embargo will be a necessary bargaining chip when a new leader takes power.

**8) The majority of Cuban Americans, the people who understand the situation best, support the embargo.** US Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, a Cuban American, and long-time proponent of the embargo, wrote in a press release, "In addition to imposing economic pressure on the Castro regime and holding it accountable for actions against U.S. interests, the embargo is a moral stance against the brutal dictatorship. Over the last 50 years, the embargo has served as a constant form of solidarity with the Cuban people." In 1991, 87% of Cuban Americans in Miami supported the embargo, and as of 2011, 53% still support maintaining it.

**9) Cuba should be subject to sanctions because it is known to have repeatedly supported acts of terrorism.** Cuba has been on the US "State Sponsors of Terrorism" list since 1982. The US State Department consistently finds evidence of Cuba's involvement in promoting violence, giving terrorists a safe haven, and harboring US fugitives. Members of the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA), a terrorist organization that operates in Spain, live in Cuba. Black Panther activist and convicted murderer Joanne Chesimard, known as Assata Shakur, is one of 90 or more criminals who fled the United States and received political asylum in Cuba. In 1996, Castro's military shot down two American civilian aircrafts, killing four people. Cuba is believed to have supported armed insurgencies in Latin America and Africa.

**10) Cuba has not demonstrated a willingness to negotiate in good faith with the United States.** President Barack Obama stated in a Sep. 28, 2011 "Open for Questions" roundtable, "Now, what we've tried to do is to send a signal that we are open to a new relationship with Cuba... [W]e have to see a signal back from the Cuban government... in order for us to be fully engaged with them. And so far, at least, what we haven't seen is the kind of genuine spirit of transformation inside of Cuba

that would justify us eliminating the embargo." Fidel Castro responded the following day by calling Obama "stupid" and saying, "Many things will change in Cuba, but they will change through our efforts and in spite of the United States. Perhaps that empire will fall first."

**11) The embargo should be maintained because open travel is insufficient to promote change in Cuba; many democratic countries already allow travel to Cuba with no results.**

Lifting all travel restrictions to Cuba would not lead to improved conditions or the spread of democracy. More than 2.7 million people from around the world visited Cuba in 2011, including more tourists from Canada than any other country. Despite the steady flow of tourism from western countries, the Cuban government still maintains total control over its people. Most Cuban nationals are banned from tourist areas such as resorts and beaches, so there would be limited contact with US citizens vacationing there.

**CON:**

**1) The United States should end the Cuba embargo because its 50-year policy has failed to achieve its goals.** Feb. 7, 2012 marked the 50th anniversary of the embargo, and the goal of forcing Cuba to adopt a representative democracy still has not been achieved. Fidel Castro resigned his presidency in 2008, and abdicated his role as the leader of Cuba's communist party in 2011 due to illness. His brother Raúl then stepped in to take his place. If 50 years of sanctions have not toppled the Castro regime, there is no reason to think the embargo will ever work.

**2) The embargo is a relic of Cold War Era thinking and is unnecessary because Cuba does not pose a threat to the United States.** Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union during the Cold War raised concerns about US national security, but that era is long over. The USSR dissolved in 1991, and American foreign policy has adapted to the change in most aspects apart from the embargo. The US Defense Intelligence Agency released a report in 1998 stating "Cuba does not pose a significant military threat to the U.S. or to other countries in the region." The embargo can no longer be justified by the fear of Communism spreading throughout the Western Hemisphere.

**3) The embargo harms the US economy.** The US Chamber of Commerce opposes the embargo, saying that it costs the United States \$1.2 billion annually in lost sales of exports. A study by the Cuba Policy Foundation, a nonprofit founded by former US diplomats, estimated that the annual cost to the US economy could be as high as \$4.84 billion in agricultural exports and related economic output. "If the embargo were lifted, the average American farmer would feel a difference in his or her life within two to three years," the study's author said. A Mar. 2010 study by Texas A&M University calculated that removing the restrictions on agricultural exports and travel to Cuba could create as many as 6,000 jobs in the US.

**4) The embargo harms the people of Cuba, not the government as intended.** Cubans are denied access to technology, medicine, affordable food, and other goods that could be available to them if the United States lifted the embargo. A report by the American Association for World Health found that doctors in Cuba have access to less than 50% of the drugs on the world market, and that food shortages led to a 33% drop in caloric intake between 1989 and 1993. The report stated, "it is our expert medical opinion that the US embargo has caused a significant rise in suffering-and even

deaths-in Cuba." Amnesty International reported in 2011 that "treatments for children and young people with bone cancer... [and] antiretroviral drugs used to treat children with HIV/AIDS" were not readily available with the embargo in place because "they were commercialized under US patents."

**5) The United States should not have different trading and travel policies for Cuba than for other countries with governments or policies it opposes.** The United States trades with China, Venezuela, and Vietnam despite their records of human rights violations. President George W. Bush lifted trade sanctions on North Korea in 2008 even amidst concerns about that nation's desire to develop nuclear weapons. Americans are permitted to travel to other communist countries, nations known for human rights violations, and even places on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism. Citizens may go to countries like Burma, Iran, and North Korea if given a visa, so there is no justification for singling Cuba as the one nation in the world that is off limits.

**6) It is hypocritical for the US government to promote democracy by prohibiting Americans from traveling there.** It is hypocritical to restrict American rights as a means of forcing another country to embrace freedom. It is also hypocritical to demand that Cuba adopt a representative democracy given the long history of US support for brutal dictatorships in countries that favor American interests, such as Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Augusto Pinochet in Chile. The United States even backed Cuban dictator General Batista (who was overthrown by Fidel Castro), someone known to have killed, tortured, and imprisoned political dissenters, because he was friendly to American interests. Furthermore, the US has a higher per capita incarceration rate than Cuba, about 716 prisoners per 100,000 people compared to an estimated 510 per 100,000 in Cuba, so concerns about the number of prisoners there is hypocritical.

**7) Most Americans want improved diplomatic ties and open travel and trade policies with Cuba.** A 2012 opinion poll of more than 1,000 US adults found that 62% of respondents thought the United States should re-establish diplomatic relations with Cuba, while only one in four was against it. Among Americans surveyed, 57% think that the travel ban to Cuba should be lifted, while only 27% think the ban should remain. Regarding the trade embargo, 51% of Americans want to open trade with Cuba, compared to 29% who do not.

**8) Cuban Americans, the people who understand the situation best, think the embargo is not working.** More than 80% of Cuban Americans surveyed in 2011 said the embargo has worked not very well or not at all. Even though President Obama eased restrictions related to Cuba in 2009, his support among Cuban Americans in Florida increased from a third of the community in 2008 to more than half in the 2012 presidential election.

**9) Free trade, not the isolation of an embargo, can promote democracy in Cuba.** Former Illinois Governor George Ryan (R) said, "I think we ought to treat Cuba like we do any other country in the world... our biggest commodity is democracy, and we ought to be spreading that any place we can. And what made this country great is free trade." An influx of US tourists and businesses would expose the sheltered island to our culture and freedoms, and weaken the Castro regime's control over information coming into the country. Trading with China led to economic reforms that brought 100 million people above the poverty line and improved access to health care and education across the country.

**10) Lifting the embargo would put pressure on Cuba to address problems that it had previously blamed on US sanctions.**

Cuban officials have not been forced to take responsibility for problems such as a failing health care system, lack of access to medicine, the decline of the sugar industry, decrepit plumbing systems, and water pollution because they use the embargo as a scapegoat. The Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs reportedly blamed the embargo for a total of \$1.66 billion in damage to the Cuban economy. President Bill Clinton said in a 2000 interview, "[S]ometimes I think [Fidel Castro] doesn't want the embargo lifted... because as long as he can blame the United States, then he doesn't have to answer to his own people for the failures of his economic policy."

**11) Most of the world opposes the embargo, and maintaining it is detrimental to the reputation of the United States among the international community.**

The United Nations has formally denounced the US embargo on Cuba every year since 1991. In 2013, 188 countries in the UN General Assembly voted to condemn the US policy; only Israel sided with the United States. American allies, such as Canada, Britain, Italy, Mexico, and France are the leading suppliers of tourists to Cuba. The US sanctions make the US look stubborn and childish in the eyes of the world. During his Mar. 2012 visit to the island, Pope Benedict XVI said the embargo "unfairly burdens" the Cuban people.

**12) The embargo prevents the people of Cuba from joining the digital age by cutting them off from technology, and restricts the electronic flow of information to the island.**

Fewer than one in four Cubans accessed the internet in 2011. Maintaining the embargo gives the Cuban government an excuse for not building a better technological infrastructure and prevents foreign companies from expanding internet access to Cubans. Some US companies have blocked access to their sites in Cuba for fear of breaching the embargo. Microsoft, for example, has disabled access to Messenger, a chat program, since 2009. A Google spokesperson said the company blocks Cuban access to its Earth, Toolbar, and Analytics programs because "As a US company, we comply with US export controls and trade sanctions that limit us from offering certain services in certain countries."