

Cubans Show Little Satisfaction with Opportunities and Individual Freedom

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Rare Independent Survey Finds Large Majorities Are Still Proud of Island's Health Care and Education

Forty-eight years after Fidel Castro entered Havana at the head of a triumphal guerrilla army, Cubans in the island's largest cities are still proud of his revolutionary government's achievements in health care and education but they express little satisfaction when asked questions about their personal freedoms and daily life.

About three-quarters are positive about their country's education and healthcare systems but only one quarter say they are happy with "their freedom to choose what to do with their life."

Cubans are also divided about the communist state that has ruled the island nation for nearly five decades. A little less than half (47%) say they approve of their government and 40 percent say they disapprove. Approval is highest among those aged 55 to 59 (61%) and lowest among young adults aged 25 to 29 (38%).

These are some of the findings of a rare independent survey of 1,000 Cubans in Havana and Santiago de Cuba. [Gallup's](#) Costa Rican affiliate—Consultoría Interdisciplinaria en Desarrollo (CID)—conducted face to face interviews in the two cities from Sept. 1-15.

The September poll took place during a period of uncertainty in Cuba. President Castro has not been seen in public since July 26, just before he underwent surgery for intestinal bleeding. He handed over power during his recovery to his brother, Raúl, in late July.

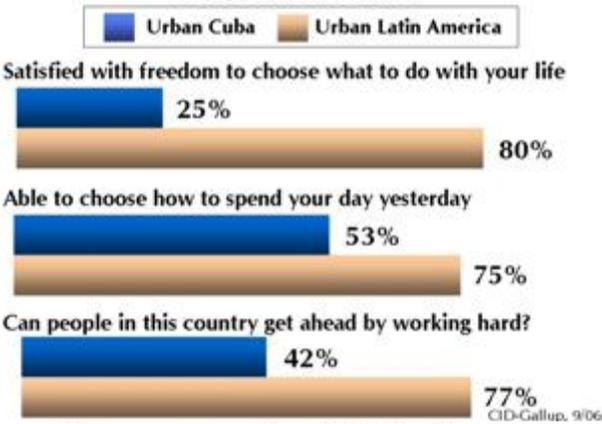
Individual Freedom

Cuban politics has been dominated by Castro for nearly five decades. It is a one-party communist state with no independent media. Freedom House, which ranks countries around the world on political rights and civil liberties, gives Cuba its lowest ranking of 7 for both.

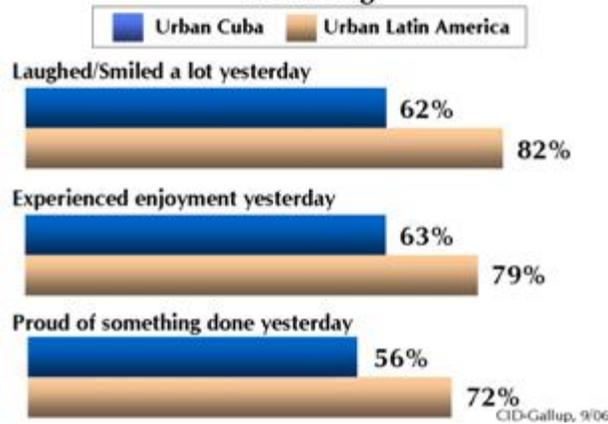
Cuba is also one of the world's most tightly controlled economies. Although the government has granted a limited number of licenses to small businesses, such as market stalls or tiny restaurants, most self employment consists of illegal trading on the black market.

Defenders of the revolution minimize the importance of civil liberties and economic freedom, pointing out the communist government's achievements in health and education. The Gallup survey suggests, however, that Cubans themselves are acutely conscious of their extremely limited individual opportunities.

Personal Freedom

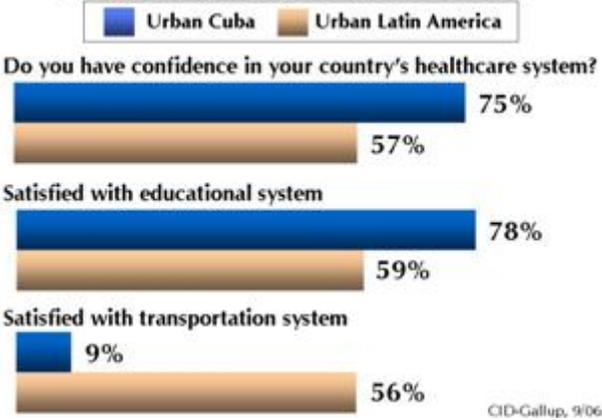


Wellbeing



Cubans in Havana and Santiago are largely dissatisfied with their personal freedom.

Views on Quality of Public Services



Only one in four (25%) say they are satisfied with their “freedom to choose what to do with [their] life.” This is far lower than the average of 80 percent in the rest of urban Latin America. It is also the lowest percentage among the more than 100 countries polled on this question, according to Gallup, ranking below impoverished and politically unstable countries such as Ethiopia (30% satisfied) and Zimbabwe (32%).

Only a third (34%) say they are able to use their talent as much as they would like compared to two-thirds (66%) of other urban Latin Americans. And only half (53%) answer affirmatively when asked if they were able to choose “how you spent your day yesterday,” compared with an average of 75 percent in other Latin American cities.

Moreover, few Cubans believe they are able to improve their lives. Only a third (31%) say they currently have a “plan, idea or invention in mind to improve [their] standard of living” and less than half (42%) say people in their country can “get ahead by working hard.” In the rest of urban Latin America, 46 percent say they have ways to get ahead and 77 percent think people in their country can get ahead through hard work.

Cubans also score relatively low on other indicators of personal well being: 56 percent say they are “proud of something” done the previous day (72% other urban Latin Americans), 63 percent say they experienced enjoyment the previous day (79% other urban Latin Americans) and 62 percent say they laughed or smiled (82% other urban Latin Americans).

Public Services

Cuban dissatisfaction with their personal lives does not mean they are negative about the revolutionary government’s achievements in health care and education. A near unanimous 96 percent of respondents say that health care in Cuba is accessible to everyone. Gallup polls in other Latin American cities have found that on average only 42 percent believe health care is accessible.

A lower, but still high, percentage (75%) say they have confidence in their country’s health care system and about the same proportion (76%) say they are satisfied with their personal health. This is a smaller proportion, however, than the average in other Latin

American cities, where 85 percent say they satisfied with their personal health, according to Gallup.

More than three-quarters of Cubans (78%) say they are satisfied with their educational system, while only six in ten (59%) other urban Latin Americans do. They are nearly unanimous (98%) in saying that education is accessible to everyone, regardless of their economic situation. In other Latin American cities, only half (52%) say education is accessible to all. Cubans are also more likely to say that college education in their country is superior to higher education in other countries (50% urban Cubans, 25% urban Latin Americans).

Transportation and housing, however, are generally seen as deficient. Only 9 percent of urban Cubans say they are satisfied with their transportation system, compared with 56 percent in other Latin American cities. Only 12 percent are satisfied with the island's roads and highways (53% of urban Latin Americans). Cubans, moreover, are less likely to have a vehicle (14% versus 27% of other urban Latin Americans).

Fifty-one percent of Cubans say they are satisfied with their housing compared with 80 percent of other urban Latin Americans. About half say they are satisfied with the community where they live (49%) and the quality of the air (53%) and water (58%). In other Latin American cities significantly higher percentages say they are satisfied with their communities (76%), air (65%) and water (73%).

CID-Gallup president Carlos Denton said interviewers did not request government permission to carry out the poll and that Cuban officials did not interfere with their work. As a precaution, however, the survey teams sent out their results every night over the internet and burned the individual questionnaires.

The questions asked were the same as those used in the Gallup World poll, a survey of more than 130 countries and areas.