

Should the U.S. Lift the Embargo on Cuba?

Sixty years ago, the United States imposed an economic embargo on Cuba. President John F. Kennedy signed an executive order putting the policy in place in 1962, shortly after Fidel Castro's Communist government seized millions of dollars' worth of U.S.-owned assets, including sugar plantations and hotels, in Cuba. The embargo, which is now the longest-lasting set of economic sanctions in American history, has lasted

through 12 presidential administrations. It prohibits U.S. companies from doing business with Cuba. It prevents Cubans from importing American products and makes U.S.-based online services, such as PayPal and Amazon, off-limits to Cubans.

The 60th anniversary of the embargo has prompted renewed debate about whether it's effective. A Latin American studies professor and a U.S. senator of Cuban ancestry face off about whether it's time to end the sanctions.

BY THE NUMBERS

**\$130
billion**

AMOUNT the United Nations says the U.S. trade embargo has cost Cuba since the sanctions were put in place.

26%

**ESTIMATED
PERCENTAGE**

of households in Cuba that receive money from relatives or friends living abroad.

42%

PERCENTAGE of American adults who support the current U.S. sanctions on Cuba; 21 percent oppose the embargo and 38 percent say they have no opinion.

SOURCES: REUTERS; INTER-AMERICAN DIALOGUE; MORNING CONSULT (POLL CONDUCTED MAY 2022)

YES The more than 60-year-old U.S. embargo against Cuba is the longest and most comprehensive set of sanctions in American history—and perhaps the most counterproductive.

For sanctions to have the desired effect of changing the behavior of a government, they must possess four qualities:

They must be narrowly targeted on a clear aim. They must be short in duration so that targeted governments can reasonably expect their removal when behavior changes. They must be supported by other countries. And they must be aimed at punishing offending governments and their officials while

**Instead of isolating
Cuba's government,
the embargo has
isolated the U.S.**

not inflicting (too much) collateral damage on a country's people. All four of these qualities are missing in the case of the U.S. embargo against Cuba.

At present, the U.S. embargo is not a single, narrowly targeted policy but a complex compendium of policies controlling everything from trade and travel to financing. They've been enacted by many different U.S. administrations for different reasons. Little wonder they've not been effective.

Instead of isolating Cuba from the world of democratic nations, the embargo has left the U.S. itself increasingly isolated, as shown each year when the United Nations votes nearly unanimously to condemn the policy. Even worse, the embargo has served the propaganda interests of the Cuban government by giving it a convenient scapegoat

on which to blame Cuba's many problems. The embargo has also fed the Communist government's narrative about a Cuban "David" standing up to the U.S. "Goliath." And perhaps the most important reason to lift the embargo: It's the Cuban people who continue to bear the brunt of this

policy, which is intended to punish the undemocratic Cuban government.

A policy of principled engagement with the Cuban people that accepts some collateral benefit for the Cuban government would be much more humane and more productive for U.S. interests than our current crude embargo. •

—TED A. HENKEN

Associate Professor, Baruch College

NO Advocates of lifting the U.S. embargo on Cuba have a serious misunderstanding of the Cuban economy and the brutal regime that controls the island.

First, we must understand what U.S. law does: It bans American businesses from trading with companies or organizations linked to the Cuban regime. It's nearly impossible to do business on the island without government connections. As a result, all economic activity in Cuba benefits a government with a long history of human rights abuses, including forced labor, torture, and executions.

Policy makers must ask themselves this: Is it in America's national interest to support that type of regime? More trade with the U.S. would only strengthen the Cuban government's control over its people. Every year, Cuba does billions of dollars of trade with Venezuela, China, Spain, Germany, and other countries. But that wealth does not reach ordinary Cubans. They remain oppressed, poor, and marginalized.

Only political reform within Cuba would open the door

to prosperity. If the regime were to release its political prisoners, allow freedom of the press, and establish free, fair, multi-party elections, real wealth building might occur. And if that happened, the U.S. embargo would end automatically, as intended by U.S. law. But we know Cuba's dictatorship will never willingly relinquish control.

**Any trade with Cuba
would only enrich
a government that
oppresses its people.**

We saw that in July 2021, when thousands of people across the island took to the streets in protest against their government. Instead of listening to its citizens' cries for freedom, the dictatorship cracked down on them, blocking internet access, abducting civil society leaders, and using state-

sanctioned violence to intimidate protesters.

American companies should not be enriching a brutal, Communist dictatorship 90 miles from our shores. If we want what is best for the Cuban people and in the best interest of the United States, we should keep the embargo in place—until Cuba is finally free. •

—SENATOR MARCO RUBIO
Republican of Florida