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## Cubans Want Capitalism

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Cuba is sometimes idealized as a successful countermodel to capitalism. This month, however, the University of Chicago's NORC released a study about the opinions of Cuba's population. The findings of the poll were clear: Cubans want capitalism.

The Cuban people are ready and willing to improve their lives, but the government prevents them from doing so.

This kind of information was not previously available because the Cuban government repressed information in and out of the island. As such, the study, based on in-person interviews with 840 randomly chosen adults, gives a rare glimpse into the sentiments of Cubans about the system under which they live.

### Cubans on Cuba

65 percent of interviewees said they want to privatize more businesses and decentralize the economy. 68 percent see competition as a positive way to promote ideas and as a motivator to work hard. Many Cubans have an entrepreneurial mindset with 56 percent of the people planning to start a business in the next 5 years. To compare, 57 percent of Americans plan to become entrepreneurs. The Cuban people are ready and willing to improve their lives, but the government prevents them from doing so.

Further, only 13 percent of the population thinks the Cuban economy is doing well. GDP shrunk by almost one percent last year. Venezuela, one of Cuba's main benefactors, had to reduce its oil deliveries by 60 percent due to their own economic crisis, which has had a heavy impact on Cuba's GDP.

The centralized economy constantly allocates resources poorly, leading to economically devastating consequences. Taxi drivers, for example, make more money than doctors due to government regulations. Well-educated professionals therefore either leave the country or take

positions far below their skill level. Scientists sell ice cream, professors become illegal book vendors, and teachers wait tables.

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In addition, centralization fuels corruption. If a doctor cannot charge a reasonable price for his services due to overregulation, he becomes either a taxi driver or starts accepting little “regalitos” to perform his services. It follows that 38 percent of the Cubans see corruption as a serious problem in their society.

Even Cuban cigars—once a synonym for tobacco excellence—have degraded in quality due to lack of competition and government mismanagement. In Cigar Aficionado’s 2016 cigar ranking, only three Cuban brands were in the top 25. Nicaragua had 16.

Since 2010, Cuba has shown attempts to decentralize the economy and expand private sector initiatives, especially in the tourism sector. Its new policies have shown some success, and last year a record high of more than 4 million tourists came to the island for holidays. Eight in ten Cubans believe that tourism should be expanded, hoping it will create jobs and boost the economy.

### **GDP Isn’t Everything**

Deeper economic reforms, however, are not expected under Cuba’s president Raúl Castro. Also, while Obama was eager to improve US-Cuba relations, Trump may take a harsher stance. As such, the majority of Cubans are pessimistic that the economy will recover anytime soon.

After all, the well-being of a population is not solely based on the level of economic output. Cuba’s high literacy rate and life expectancy are often used to argue that socialist policies improve living standards, despite the lack of material wealth. It is indeed true that Cuba has one of the highest literacy rates in the world, at 99.7 percent. Yet, most countries are in this range, with a third of the world’s countries above 95 percent.

Cuba also slightly outranks the United States in life expectancy, with an average of 79.55 and 79.16 years respectively. However, both countries are not in the top group, ranking 37th and 39th respectively. As such, the United States’ low ranking is more remarkable than Cuba’s good score. Nevertheless, access to medical care and education were named as a relatively little concern by the Cuban population.

Other social issues were regarded as more pressing. 51 percent of Cubans report that crime is a serious problem. In addition, government interference with private life is felt severely. 41 percent complained about the lack of internet access, 76 percent of the people think that they must be careful about what they say and that they cannot express themselves freely. Understandable. Just this week, pro-democracy leader, Eduardo Cardet was sentenced to three years in jail for criticizing the government in a radio interview.

It is no surprise then, that more than half of the population wants to leave Cuba, given the chance. Seven in ten of those people would like to come to the United States. 60 years after the

communist revolution it is obvious that Cubans do not abhor, but desire, a more capitalist and free society.

Raul Castro has already announced that he will not run for reelection as president in 2018. Then, hopefully, the new regime will listen to the will of its people.