

CUBA

	2012	2013
INTERNET FREEDOM STATUS	NOT FREE	NOT FREE
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	24	24
Limits on Content (0-35)	29	29
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	33	33
Total (0-100)	86	86

POPULATION: 11.2 million
INTERNET PENETRATION 2012: 15 percent
SOCIAL MEDIA/ICT APPS BLOCKED: Yes
POLITICAL/SOCIAL CONTENT BLOCKED: YES
BLOGGERS/ICT USERS ARRESTED: Yes
PRESS FREEDOM 2013 STATUS: Not Free

* 0=most free, 100=least free

KEY DEVELOPMENTS: MAY 2012 – APRIL 2013

- Cuba’s eagerly anticipated high speed ALBA-1 fiber optic cable, which was expected to increase data transmission speeds on the internet 3000 fold, was connected in early 2013; however, access was limited to select government offices rather than being extended throughout Cuba (see **OBSTACLES TO ACCESS**).
- The government imposed tighter restrictions on e-mail in the workplace, installing a platform that blocks “chain letters critical of the government” (see **LIMITS ON CONTENT**).
- In 2012 and 2013, the government continued its practice of employing a “cyber militia” to slander dissident bloggers and to disseminate official propaganda (see **LIMITS ON CONTENT**).
- Arbitrary detentions and intimidation of bloggers increased in late 2012 (see **VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS**).
- Travel restrictions were loosened in early 2013 and some high-profile bloggers, such as Yoani Sánchez, were granted permission to leave Cuba for the first time in years (see **VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS**).

INTRODUCTION

Cuba, which bore witness to another crackdown on bloggers and citizen journalists in late 2012, has long ranked as one of the world's most repressive environments for information and communication technologies (ICTs). High prices, exceptionally slow connectivity, and prodigious government regulation have resulted in a pronounced lack of access to applications and services other than e-mail. Most users can access only a government controlled *intranet*, rather than the global *internet*. Despite a handful of changes in Cuba's ICT landscape over the past year—including an increase in mobile phone penetration and the activation of the highly anticipated ALBA-1 fiber optic cable in January 2013—access to the internet and other ICTs remains limited. Nevertheless, a growing community of bloggers has consolidated their work, creatively using online and offline means to express opinions and spread information about conditions in the country.

Although the government appeared to loosen its restrictions on online media by unblocking a number of blogs in 2011, this period of opening was short-lived, as illustrated by a rash of arbitrary detentions in November and December 2012. Progovernment blogs that dared to be too critical of government policy were blocked, and phone numbers associated with the “speak-to-tweet” platform, widely used by activists to publicize human rights violations, were shut down. Such activity is not uncommon in Cuba; however, in 2013, the number of blocked websites remains more or less the same as it was in 2012. At least a dozen bloggers have been arrested, several nonviolent activists have been publicly beaten, and one citizen journalist was held without formal charges for six months before his eventual release (see Violations of User Rights). Surveillance remains extensive, extending to government-installed software designed to monitor and control office e-mail accounts as well as many of the island's public internet access points.¹

OBSTACLES TO ACCESS

Internet access in Cuba is complicated by weak infrastructure and tight government control. While recent years have seen an expansion in the number of internet and mobile phone users, the ICT sector remains dominated by government firms. Restrictions on private enterprise were eased under the 2012 update of Cuba's economic model. Proposed reforms did not extend to liberalization of the communications sector, however.²

According to the National Statistics Office, there were 2.6 million internet users in Cuba in 2011, representing 23.2 percent of the population.³ The latest data from the International

¹Radio Surco, “Prestaciones Efectivas para Redes Informáticas” [Effective Features for Computer Networks], April 11, 2009, <http://www.radiosurco.icrt.cu/Ciencia.php?id=415> (site discontinued); Danny O'Brien, “The Malware Lockdown in Havana and Hanoi,” *CPJ Blog*, June 8, 2010, <http://cpi.org/blog/2010/06/the-malware-lockdown-in-havana-and-hanoi.php>.

²Nick Miroff, “Cuba is Reforming, but Wealth and Success are Still Frowned Upon,” *Business Insider*, September 4, 2012, <http://www.businessinsider.com/cubas-economic-transition-2012-9>.

³National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI), *Tecnología de la Información y la Comunicaciones en Cifras, Cuba 2011* [Information and Communication Technology, Cuba 2011] (Havana: ONEI, June 2012), <http://bit.ly/15BVDBC>.

Telecommunication Union (ITU) places Cuba's internet penetration at 25.64 percent as of 2012.⁴ The vast majority of users cannot access the internet proper, but are instead relegated to a tightly controlled government-filtered *intranet*, which consists of a national e-mail 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.⁵ Experts estimate that approximately 5 percent of Cubans periodically have access to the world wide web via government institutions, some foreign embassies, and black market sales of minutes by those permitted to have such accounts.⁶ The National Statistics Office claimed a 46 percent gain in internet users in 2011, but only an 8 percent increase in networked computers, confirming the high percentage of people using shared computers and the lack of development in Cuba's ICT sector. Similarly, there was only a 3 percent increase in the number of domains registered, indicating that few governmental organizations are creating new websites.⁷

In 2000, the Ministry of Informatics and Communication (MIC) was created to serve as the regulatory authority for the internet. Its Cuban Supervision and Control Agency oversees the development of internet-related technologies.⁸ Despite a January 2010 government announcement that national bandwidth had been expanded, there is still no broadband service and the limited number of Cubans with internet access face extremely slow connections, making the use of multimedia applications nearly impossible.⁹ According to statistical findings from an April 2012 Google Analytics study, Cuba has the slowest connection speed in the Western Hemisphere and is among the worst in the world; globally, its only peers are Liberia and Sierra Leone.¹⁰ Access over the intranet is similarly slow due to weak domestic infrastructure.

The Cuban government continues to blame the U.S. embargo for the country's connectivity problems, saying it must use a slow, costly satellite connection system and may only buy limited space. President Barack Obama eased some aspects of Washington's prolonged trade sanctions in 2009, however, allowing U.S. telecommunications firms to enter into roaming agreements with Cuban providers and to establish fiber-optic cable and satellite telecommunication facilities linking the United States and Cuba.¹¹ Official media ignored this important change in the U.S. legal framework, however, and Cuban leaders reiterated their demand for a complete end to the embargo.

⁴ International Telecommunication Union (ITU), *Statistics: Percentage of Individuals Using the Internet, 2000-2012*, ITU, June 17, 2013, http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2013/Individuals_Internet_2000-2012.xls.

⁵ ETECSA: Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A., accessed August 28, 2010, <http://www.etcসা.сu/>.

⁶ *Emerging Frontiers* (blog), "In Cuba Mystery Shrouds Fate of Internet Cable," May 23, 2012, <http://emergingfrontiersblog.com/2012/05/23/in-cuba-mystery-shrouds-fate-of-internet-cable/>.

⁷ Larry Press, "Updated Cuban ICT statistics," *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), July 26, 2012, <http://laredcubana.blogspot.com.es/2012/07/updated-cuban-ict-statistics.html> (No figures have yet been released for 2013).

⁸ For the website of The Ministry of Informatics and Communications see: <http://www.mic.gov.cu/>.

⁹ Amaury E. del Valle, "Cuba, La Red Sigue Creciendo" [Cuba, the Network Continues to Grow], *Juventud Rebelde* online, January 6, 2010, <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/suplementos/informatica/2010-01-06/cuba-la-red-sigue-creciendo/>; See also: Larry Press, "Past, Present, and Future of the Internet in Cuba," in *Papers and Proceedings of the Twenty-first Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE)* (Miami: ASCE, August 2011), <http://bit.ly/w4nQPU>.

¹⁰ *Google Analytics* (blog), Blogspot, last modified April 19, 2012, <http://bit.ly/IBvq5p>.

¹¹ "Fact Sheet: Reaching Out to the Cuban People," The White House: Office of the Press Secretary, April 13, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Fact-Sheet-Reaching-out-to-the-Cuban-people.

The bilateral relationship was also affected by a 2009 incident that directly touched on the lack of open internet access in Cuba. On December 4, the Cuban authorities arrested Alan Gross, an American independent contractor who was in the country to set up individual satellite-based internet connections as part of a U.S. government-funded project. In March 2011, Gross was sentenced to 15 years in prison for committing an act “against the independence or territorial integrity of the state.”¹² He is currently serving his sentence in a Cuban prison.

In February 2011, Cuban officials celebrated the installation of a 1,600 km (1,000 mile) undersea fiber-optic cable laid between Cuba and Venezuela at a cost of approximately \$72 million.¹³ The eagerly anticipated cable, known as ALBA-1, was expected to increase data-transmission speeds 3,000 fold, but more than two years after installation the government remains silent on its activation.¹⁴ In the absence of official information, rumors began to spread about technical problems and corruption scandals.¹⁵ There was also speculation that Cuban authorities had grown wary of increasing internet access due to the role of social media in the Arab Spring protests.¹⁶ On January 24, 2013, there was finally evidence that the cable had been connected. While the development is significant, ETECSA has announced that the opening of the line will be gradual (predictably limited to select government offices at first) and that infrastructure must still be enhanced in order to facilitate widespread use of the technology.¹⁷

Prohibitively high costs also place internet access beyond the reach of most of the population. A simple computer with a monitor averages around CUC 722 (\$722) in retail outlets, or at least CUC 550 (\$550) on the black market.¹⁸ By comparison, the average monthly Cuban salary is approximately CUC 16 (\$16).¹⁹ Even an internet connection in a hotel costs between CUC 6 and 12 (\$6-12) per hour.²⁰ Computers are generally distributed by the state-run Copextel Corporation, yet only 31 percent of Cubans report having access to a computer. Of those with access, 85 percent noted that the computers were located at work or school.²¹

¹² Ellery Roberts Biddle, “Cuba: US Contractor Sentenced to 15 Years in Prison,” *Global Voices*, April 4, 2011, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/04/04/cuba-us-contractor-sentenced-to-15-years-in-prison/>.

¹³ Ministerio de Educación Superior, “Cable de Fibra Optica Une Venezuela, Cuba y Jamaica” [Fiber Optic Cable Unites Venezuela, Cuba, and Jamaica], accessed August 13, 2012, <http://bit.ly/1bhCqDV>; *El País*, “Llega a Cuba el Cable Submarine de Fibra Optica para Ofrecer Internet de Banda Ancha” [Underwater Fiber Optic Cable Arrives in Cuba to Offer Broad Band Internet], February 10, 2011, http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2011/02/10/actualidad/1297292404_850215.html.

¹⁴ Curt Hopkins, “Cuba’s Internet Capacity to Increase 3,000x,” *ReadWriteWeb* (blog), February 13, 2011, http://www.readriteweb.com/archives/cubas_internet_capacity_increased_by_3000_percent.php; International Telecommunication Union (ITU) News Release, “ITU Hails Connectivity Boost for Cuba,” February 11, 2011, http://www.itu.int/net/pressoffice/press_releases/2011/CM03.aspx.

¹⁵ *Emerging Frontiers* (blog), “In Cuba Mystery Shrouds Fate of Internet Cable,” May 23, 2012, <http://emergingfrontiersblog.com/2012/05/23/in-cuba-mystery-shrouds-fate-of-internet-cable/>.

¹⁶ Nick Miroff, “In Cuba, Dial-Up Internet is a Luxury,” *National Public Radio*, December 14, 2011, <http://n.pr/vFmLh1>.

¹⁷ *BBC* online, “Cuba First High-Speed Internet Connection Activated,” January 24, 2012, <http://bbc.in/V0ggOM>.

¹⁸ Will Weissert, “Cubans Queue for Computers as PC Ban Lifted, But Web Still Outlawed,” *Irish Examiner* online, May 5, 2008, <http://bit.ly/197EZdn>.

¹⁹ Agence France-Presse, “Mobile Phone Use Booms in Cuba Following Easing of Restrictions,” April 24, 2008.

²⁰ Tracey Eaton, “Cuban Dissident Blogger Yoani Sanchez Tours the United States,” *Florida Center for Investigative Reporting*, March 20, 2013, <http://fcir.org/2013/03/20/cuban-dissident-blogger-yoani-sanchez-tours-the-united-states/>.

²¹ National Statistics Office (ONE), Republic of Cuba, *Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones en Cifras: Cuba 2009* [Information and Communication Technologies in Figures: Cuba 2009] (Havana: ONE, May 2010), <http://bit.ly/19esVBl>.

Cubans can legally access the internet only by providing identification for on-site computer use at government-approved institutions, such as the approximately 600 Joven Club de Computación (Youth Computer Clubs) and points of access run by ETECSA.²² While some ETECSA kiosks in the main cities of Havana and Santiago advertise internet access, field research has found that the kiosks often lack computers, instead offering public phones for local and international calls with prepaid phone cards. In June 2009, the government adopted a new law (Resolution No. 99/2009) allowing the Cuban Postal Service, which is under the domain of the Ministry of Computers and Communications, to establish cybercafes at its premises and offer internet access to the public.²³ Since then, a small number have been slowly established.²⁴

There are only two ISPs in Cuba: CENIAI Internet and ENET (ETECSA). Both are owned by the state, though Telecom Italia previously held shares of ETECSA. In February 2011, 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 \$706 million.²⁵ As a result, the telecom company is now completely owned by six Cuban state entities. Cubacel, a subsidiary of ETECSA, is the only mobile phone carrier in Cuba.

Although the Cuban government began to allow the limited creation of private cooperatives by computer science graduates in 2012, tight internet restrictions, along with prohibitively high computer and software pricing, have resulted in a nonexistent official hardware and software market. A black market for such commodities does exist, but given the inherent challenges, Cuban ICT liberalization is mostly rhetoric and will likely have little impact on those in the communications sector.²⁶

The Cuban government continues to control the legal and institutional structures that determine who has access to the internet and how much access will be permitted.²⁷ This regulation extends to the sale and distribution of internet-related equipment. In early 2008, after a nearly decade-long ban, the government began allowing Cubans to buy personal computers. Cuban officials or "trusted journalists" can now legally connect to an ISP with a government permit. Approved access to the internet, which is typically restricted to e-mail and sites related to one's occupation, is granted to doctors, professors, and government officials, whose offices are linked by an online network called Infomed. Home connections are not yet allowed for the vast majority of Cubans.

The government claims that all schools have computer laboratories, but in practice, internet access is usually prohibited for students or limited to very short periods of access, certain e-mail accounts, or supervised activities on the national intranet. Students at the Latin American School of Medicine

²² For the club system's website, see: <http://www.cfg.jovenclub.cu/>.

²³ Resolution No. 99/2009 was published in the Official Gazette on June 29, 2009.

²⁴ As of May 2013, no new points of access had been established.

²⁵ Jerrold Colten, "Telecom Italia Sells Etecsa Stake to Rafin SA For \$706 Million," Bloomberg, January 31, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-01-31/telecom-italia-sells-etecsa-stake-to-rafin-sa-for-706-million.html>.

²⁶ Various Authors, "Se Buscan Socios," *Juventud Rebelde* digital edition, December 15, 2012, <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/cuba/2012-12-15/se-buscan-socios/>.

²⁷ Ben Corbett, *This Is Cuba: An Outlaw Culture Survives* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2002), 145.

in Havana, for example, are reportedly granted only 40 minutes a week of internet access, rendering online research or accessing academic journals infeasible.²⁸

Despite the many barriers, Cubans still find ways of connecting to the internet through both authorized and unauthorized points of access. Some are able to break through infrastructural blockages by building their own antennas, using illegal dial-up connections, or developing blogs on foreign platforms. The underground economy of internet access also includes account sharing, in which authorized users sell access to those without an official account for one or two convertible pesos (CUC) per hour. Some foreign embassies allow Cubans to use their facilities, but a number of people who have visited embassies for this purpose have reported police harassment. There is also a thriving improvisational system of “sneakernets,” in which USB keys and data discs are used to distribute material (articles, prohibited photos, satirical cartoons, video clips) that has been downloaded from the internet or stolen from government offices.

Cuba still has the lowest mobile phone penetration rate in Latin America, but the number is rising quickly. According to official reports, as of the end of 2012, 1.5 million Cubans—about 11 percent of the population—had mobile phones, a dramatic increase since 2009 when that figure was approximately 443,000.²⁹ Following its March 2008 easing of restrictions on mobile phone purchases, during 2011 and 2012 the government reduced the sign-up fee by over 50 percent—although it still represents three months’ wages for an average worker. As the number of mobile phone users has grown, ETECSA has begun implementing small changes to terms of service, such as charging the caller rather than the recipient (receiving phone calls from within Cuba is now free) and cutting the cost of text messages in half.³⁰ In 2012, ETECSA also reduced daytime cellphone rates from CUC 0.60 to CUC 0.35 per minute.³¹

²⁸ Graham Sowa, “Why Students in Cuba Need Internet,” *Havana Times*, May 23, 2011, <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=44073>.

²⁹ Marc Frank, “More Cubans Have Local Intranet, Mobile Phones,” Reuters, June 15, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/15/net-us-cuba-telecommunications-idUSBRE85D14H20120615>; See also: (1) “ETECSA Mobile Phone Users Cross Million Mark,” *Cubastandard.com*, July 14, 2010 <http://www.cubastandard.com/2010/07/14/etecsa-mobile-phone-users-cross-million-mark>; (2) “Cuban Cellphones Hit One Million, Net Access Lags,” Reuters, July 7, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/07/us-cuba-telecom-idUSTRE76661920110707>; (3) Amaury E. del Valle, “Cuba Aumenta Cantidad de Teléfonos Fijos y Móviles” [Cuba Increases Quantity of Fixed and Mobile Telephones], *Juventud Rebelde* online, December 26, 2011, <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/ciencia-tecnica/2011-12-26/cuba-aumenta-cantidad-de-telefonos-fijos-y-moviles/>; (4) International Telecommunication Union (ITU), “Mobile-Cellular Telephone Subscriptions,” 2011, accessed July 13, 2012, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx#>. For analysis (in Spanish): Emilio Morales, “Cuba: Teléfonos Celulares y Llamadas Costosas” [Cuba: Cellphones and Expensive Calls], *Café Fuerte*, January 17, 2012, <http://cafefuerte.com/cuba/noticias-de-cuba/economia-y-negocios/1474-cuba-telefonos-celulares-y-llamadas-costosas>.

³⁰ *Americas View* (blog), “Telecoms in Cuba: Talk is cheap,” *The Economist* online, January 24, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/americasview/2012/01/telecoms-cuba>.

³¹ For changes implemented by ETECSA, see: Camila Díaz Molina, “Se Extenderán los Plazos de Vigencia de Líneas de Celular en Cubacel,” [Effective Period of Cubacel Cell Lines to be Extended] *Cubacelular.org*, December 16, 2012, <http://www.cubacelular.org/2012/12/se-extenderan-los-plazos-de-vigencia-de.html>; and Camila Díaz Molina, “Cubacel Anuncia Nueva Tarifa para el Servicio de Teléfono Móvil en Cuba,” *Cubacelular.org*, January 12, 2013, <http://www.cubacelular.org/2013/01/cubacel-anuncia-nueva-tarifa-para-el.html>.

Cuba has roaming agreements with 342 carriers in 139 countries,³² and 2.2 million people used these services in Cuba in 2010.³³ The island's mobile network reportedly covers 78 percent of Cuban territory, with further expansions planned.³⁴ Most mobile phones do not include internet connections, but it is possible to send and receive international text messages and photographs with certain phones. Phones that utilize Global Positioning System (GPS) technology or satellite connections, however, are explicitly prohibited by Cuban customs regulations.³⁵ Additional restrictions are placed on modems, wireless faxes, and satellite dishes, which require special permits from the MIC in order to enter the country.³⁶

At times of heightened political sensitivity, the government has used its complete control of the cell phone network to selectively obstruct citizens' communications. During a March 2012 visit to the island by Pope Benedict XVI, bloggers and dissidents reported that their cell phones were not working.³⁷ One independent journalist who investigated the situation found that calls were being automatically redirected to a phone number belonging to the Ministry of Interior.³⁸ All calls from dissidents' cell phones are monitored and the service is cut regularly to those working as freelance journalists or voicing views the government does not approve via citizen journalism. In October 2012, during the criminal trial concerning the wrongful death of long time civil rights activist Oswaldo Payá, dissident blogger Yoani Sánchez's phone was reportedly disconnected and her Twitter account was reportedly blocked.³⁹

The Cuban government zealously pursues those who violate telecommunications access laws, and government technicians routinely "sniff" neighborhoods with their handheld devices in search of ham-radios and satellite dishes. In December 2012, the official newspaper *Granma* explicitly warned against "counterrevolutionary" and subversive use of illegal nets.⁴⁰ In an extensive report entitled: "Violations of the Cuban Telecommunications System," *Granma* detailed the criminal investigation of two highly profitable cyber-networks illegally using ETECSA's fixed and mobile market channels. The investigation is still in progress, but the information provided by the MIC and the Attorney General alleges that the illegal networks began operating in 2009 and were responsible for a loss of revenue for ETECSA totaling three million dollars. The defendants, who are being prosecuted for illegal economic activity and fraud, face fines coupled with sentences of three to ten years in prison.

³² Camila Díaz Molina, "Roaming Internacional para Usuarios de Cubacel," [International Roaming for Users of Cubacel] Cubacelular.org, November 10, 2012, <http://www.cubacelular.org/2012/11/roaming-internacional-para-usuarios-de.html>.

³³ Cuba Standard, "Syniverse Holding Back \$2.5m in Cuban Roaming Charges," Cubastandard.com, October 21, 2011, <http://bit.ly/1azWEaY>, (These figures reflect the most recent data available)

³⁴ Nick Miroff, "Getting Cell Phones into Cuban Hands," *Global Post*, May 17, 2010, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/cuba/100514/cell-phone>

³⁵ See: Cuban Customs Website (Aduana General de la Republica de Cuba): <http://bit.ly/1hbJFOI>.

³⁶ See: Cuban Customs Website (Aduana General de la Republica de Cuba).

³⁷ *Hispanically Speaking News*, "Silenced During Papal Visit, Cuban Bloggers, Dissidents Speak Out (VIDEO)," April 7, 2012, <http://bit.ly/15Cqt7h>.

³⁸ Juan O. Tamayo, "Cuba Diverts Dissidents' Phone Numbers in Pope Crackdown," *The Miami Herald* online, March 30, 2012, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/03/30/2723658/cubas-interior-ministry-left-fingerprint.html>.

³⁹ *BBC* online, "Cuban Dissident Blogger Yoani Sanchez Arrested," October 5, 2012, <http://bbc.in/Wuw19Z>.

⁴⁰ Sheyla Delgado Guerra, "El 'Enredado' y Costoso Saldo de la Ilegalidad," [The "Tangled" and Expensive Balance of Illegality] *Granma* online, December 7, 2012, <http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/2012/12/07/nacional/artic07.html>.

LIMITS ON CONTENT

Rather than relying on the technically sophisticated filtering and blocking used by other repressive regimes, the Cuban government limits users' access to information primarily via lack of technology and prohibitive costs. With the exception of unauthorized points of access in old Havana, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is blocked in Cuba, and social media applications, including Facebook and Twitter, are largely unavailable. Late 2012 and early 2013 witnessed tighter restrictions on e-mail in the workplace, along with an increase in the disabling of dissident websites and blogs. The cost of access to technologies that facilitate information sharing continues to be high; nonetheless, there is a vibrant community of bloggers in Cuba who utilize the medium to report on conditions within the country.

The websites of foreign news outlets—including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *Le Monde*, and *El Nuevo Herald* (a Miami-based Spanish-language daily)—are readily available; however, extremely slow connection speeds impede access to content.⁴¹ The sites of some human rights groups, such as Human Rights Watch and Freedom House, remain largely accessible, but Amnesty International's website was recently blocked in Cuba.⁴² For the most part, dissident news websites such as Payolibre, and independent journalism sites hosted on overseas servers, such as Cubanet, fall into the category of restricted access. The Association for Freedom of the Press (SIAPA) is also blocked, as are the websites of dissident organizations with a presence on the island (such as Damas de Blanco, MCL and UNPACU), which remain inaccessible from government-sponsored youth computer centers.⁴³ Revolico, a platform for posting classified advertisements, continues to be blocked, despite the apolitical nature of its content.⁴⁴

Social-networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were recently blocked at some universities and government institutions, but may be accessed with consistent monitoring but varying reliability from some cybercafes and hotels. YouTube, by contrast, remains inaccessible from all points of access. The government has also increased control over the use of e-mail in official institutions, installing a new platform that restricts spam and specifically prevents the transmission of "chain letters critical of the government."⁴⁵

While ETECSA does not proactively police networks and delete content, there are reportedly cases of bloggers removing posts after being threatened by officials for publishing views criticizing government actions.⁴⁶ Cases of self-censorship and removal have increased in recent months,

⁴¹ Reporters Without Borders News Release, "Free Expression Must Go with Better Communications, Says Reporters Without Borders as Blogs Prove Hard to Access," March 31, 2008, <http://bit.ly/16K5E9s>.

⁴² As reported by a source in Havana who wishes to remain anonymous.

⁴³ For *Bitácora Cubana* see: <http://cubabit.blogspot.com/>; For the website of Asociación pro Libertad de Prensa (the Association for Freedom of the Press) see: <http://prolibertadprensa.blogspot.com/>.

⁴⁴ Marc Lacey, "A Black Market Finds a Home in the Web's Back Alleys," *New York Times* online, January 3, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/04/world/americas/04havana.html>; Peter Orsi, "Cuba's Next Step on Capitalist Road: Advertising," *Boston.com*, June 16, 2012, <http://bo.st/KR3Kch>.

⁴⁵ Café Fuerte, "Cuba Anuncia Cambio de Plataforma Estatal para Correos Electronicos," [Cuba Announces Statewide Change to Email Platform] *Cafefuerte.com*, August 31 2012, <http://bit.ly/RgHp8C>.

⁴⁶ For examples, see: Café Fuerte, "Malestar por Cambio de Edificio del Partido Comunista en Camagüey," [Upset over Change

extending to blogs that published only moderate criticism of the government but were deemed “revolutionary” and subsequently blocked or disabled in late 2012. Furthermore, the wording of certain government provisions regarding content regulation is vague and allows a wide array of posts to be censored without oversight. Resolution 179 (2008), for example, 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.”⁴⁷

Beginning in 2007, the government systematically blocked core internet portal sites such as Yahoo, MSN, and Hotmail. As of 2013, these sites remain blocked in some government institutions, although they are largely accessible from hotels. Cuban authorities also restricted access to Cuban and foreign websites that contained independent reporting or views critical of the government. Among the continuously blocked sites were the *Bitácora Cubana* blog and the Voces Cubana platform, which hosts approximately 40 blogs including Yoani Sánchez’s well-known *Generación Y*. While most of these sites and international portals were unblocked without explanation in February 2011, in late 2012 several other self-declared “pro-revolution” blogs were almost disabled. Facilities of access were severely restricted, and as a result bloggers from the targeted sites (which included University of Matanzas’ student-run *La Joven Cuba*, and Elaine Diaz’s *La Polemica Digital*) were able to publish only two or three posts.⁴⁸ *La Joven Cuba* was blocked until April 2013 but is now accessible. Content on *La Polemica Digital* remains available, however blog activity is sporadic.⁴⁹ In both cases, the associated bloggers were subject to intimidation, resulting in self-censorship.

Unable to completely suppress dissident activity on the internet through legal and infrastructural constraints, the authorities have taken a number of countermeasures, including dominating conversations within the medium itself. The Cuban government maintains a major presence on social networks via “Operación Verdad,” (Operation Truth), its veritable cyber militia of approximately 1,000 trusted students from the University of Computer Sciences (UCI) who were recruited to promote the government’s agenda and to slander dissident bloggers and independent journalists.⁵⁰ In February 2013, Yoani Sanchez interviewed blogger Eliécer Avila, a former UCI student—and leader of Operación Verdad.⁵¹ Referring to the group as the “kilobyte police,”

to Communist Party Building in Camagüey] Cafefuerte.com, July 27, 2012, <http://cafefuerte.com/cuba/noticias-de-cuba/sociedad/2050-malestar-por-cambio-de-edificio-del-partido-comunista-en-camagueey>; and *El Yuma* (blog), “LJC, The Orwellian ‘Memory Hole,’ & Google Cache,” Blogspot, July 8, 2012, <http://bit.ly/RPbiCO>.

⁴⁷ Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa, Inc., (Inter American Press Association), “Cuba,” in *Reports and Resolutions*, accessed January 28, 2013, http://www.sipiapa.com/v4/det_informe.php?idioma=us&asamblea=22&inford=346.

⁴⁸ *El Yuma* (blog), “La Blogosfera Cubana: 2012 Year in Review,” [The Cuban Blogosphere: 2012 Year in Review] Blogspot, December 19, 2012, <http://elyuma.blogspot.com.es/2012/12/la-blogosfera-cubana-2012-year-in-review.html>; and Elaine Diaz, *La Polemica Digital* (blog), [The Digital Controversy] Wordpress.com, <http://espaciodeelaine.wordpress.com/>

⁴⁹ The site’s most recent activity was a “last post” published in August 2012 accompanied by one more exceptional post in December 2012.

⁵⁰ Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *After the Black Spring, Cuba’s New Repression* (New York: July 6, 2011), <http://cpj.org/reports/CPJ.Cuba.Report.July.2011.pdf>. See also: *Cambios en Cuba* [Changes in Cuba] (blog): <http://cambiosencuba.blogspot.com/>; *Yohandry’s blog*: <http://yohandry.wordpress.com/>; and the official blogger’s platform CubaSí: <http://www.cubasi.cu>.

⁵¹ Miriam Celaya, “The Internet Has its Own Soul: Eliécer Avila in a Revealing Interview,” *Translating Cuba* (blog), February 21, 2013, <http://translatingcuba.com/category/authors/eliecer-avila/>.

Sanchez stated that the interview “corroborated” theories that State Security had created blogs to “denigrate and discredit the citizen who criticizes the system.”⁵²

During the same month, video of a government training on social media appeared on the internet. In the footage, which was apparently leaked, a Cuban official warns agents of the potential threat that activist bloggers pose, alluding to the possibility that a popular blogger like Yoani Sanchez could organize protests in Havana similar to those that occurred in Iran in 2009.⁵³ He concludes by saying that the government must respond to these threats.

The government has also launched its own copycat versions of popular websites, such as Wikipedia and Facebook, and by some accounts, is delaying full connectivity of the ALBA-1 cable until the sites are fully operational so that content can be closely controlled.⁵⁴ The online encyclopedia EcuRed, unveiled in December 2010, uses similar software and layout to its international counterpart, Wikipedia. However, a cursory review indicates that it is updated by only a small number of people, rather than an interactive community, and that it consists of 78,000 articles compared to several million on Wikipedia. Attempts to create an editor profile using an “.edu” or Gmail email account were reportedly rejected.⁵⁵ The government is preparing a portable version of EcuRed to be installed in cell phones in 2013.⁵⁶ In December 2011, a social-networking website called Red Social, accessible only from Cuba’s intranet, was launched. Its layout matched Facebook so closely that some questioned whether it was a violation of copyright. According to one local blogger, however, shortly after its launch it no longer appeared to be functioning, possibly a reflection of the lack of server capacity to maintain it.⁵⁷

In Cuba, the obstacles to sharing information are significant—the majority of citizen journalism is done offline, often by hand or typewriter, and uploaded and published once or twice a week. The financial cost of freedom of expression is also great; the tools that facilitate contribution to media outlets, such as paid internet access cards and international phone calls, are prohibitive and present a major obstacle.

While there is no exact count of blogs produced in Cuba, *Blogs Cubanos* reports that there are now

⁵²Yoani Sanchez, “Operation Truth,” *Translating Cuba* (blog), February 11, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1bj2Ati>.

⁵³“Coral Negro,” “La Ciber Policia en Cuba” [The Cyber Police in Cuba], Vimeo (Video), posted January 31, 2011), <http://vimeo.com/19402730>; English transcription: <http://translatingcuba.com/?p=7111>; See Also: “Acuse de Recibo: ¿Quién es el Ciberpolicía?” [Acknowledgement of Receipt: Who is the Cyber Policeman?], *Penúltimos Días*, February 5, 2011, <http://www.penultimosdias.com/2011/02/05/acuse-de-recibo-18/>.

⁵⁴In May 2012, Venezuela’s minister of science and technology told media that the cable was operational, but that it was up to the Cuban government to employ it. Some experts reported that internet speeds had improved in the Ministry of Interior or other government offices, adding to speculation that the government is using the cable in part to provide Venezuelan officials with access to Cuban government databases, while deliberately postponing access to the cable for average users. See: “Venezuela: Fiber-optic Cable to Cuba is Working,” *Businessweek*, May 24, 2012, <http://www.businessweek.com/ap/2012-05-24/venezuela-fiber-optic-cable-to-cuba-is-working>; Larry Press, “Hard Data on the Idle ALBA-1 Undersea Cable,” *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), May 22, 2012, <http://laredcubana.blogspot.com.es/2012/05/hard-data-on-idle-alba-1-undersea-cable.html>.

⁵⁵Larry Press, “EcuRed is Not Open like Wikipedia,” *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), December 21, 2011, <http://laredcubana.blogspot.com/2011/12/ecured-is-not-open-like-wikipedia.html>.

⁵⁶Cuba Debate online, “EcuRed Se Cuela en los Celulares” [EcuRed Aneaks into the Cell], December 27, 2012, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2012/12/27/ecured-se-cuela-en-los-celulares>.

⁵⁷*The Philandrist* (blog), “The Cuban Facebook Imitation Saga – Red Social (Social Network),” December 6, 2011, <http://thephilandrist.wordpress.com/2011/12/06/the-cuban-facebook-imitation-saga-redsocial/>.

more than 1,600, including sites such as *Retazos* and *Convivencia*.⁵⁸ Independent websites hosted outside the country, such as *La Polemica Digital*, *Havana Times*, and *Estado de Sats*, provide the few who are able to access the net with a much richer and more robust selection of news sources and perspectives than those available from state-run media. Regional radio stations, magazines, and official newspapers are also creating online versions, though these are state-run and do not accept contributions from independent journalists. Some of these official sites recently installed commentary tools that foster discussion and allow readers to provide feedback, albeit censored.

In recent years, blogger Yoani Sánchez has become the most visible figure in an independent movement that uses new media to report on conditions that violate basic freedoms. As of March 2013, Sánchez's followers on Twitter totaled over 455,280, though only 26 percent were from within Cuba.⁵⁹ Sánchez and other online writers—including Claudia Cadelo, Miriam Celaya, Orlando Luis Pardo, Reinaldo Escobar, Laritza Diversent, and Luis Felipe Rojas—have come together on the *Voces Cubanas* blogging platform to portray a reality that official media ignores. Despite the government's open disapproval—in 2011, the daughter of President Raúl Castro's, Mariela, publicly referred to the bloggers as “despicable parasites”⁶⁰—the movement has garnered broad support throughout society. In order to further promote freedom of expression, Sánchez has begun hosting Twitter workshops in her home, a bold move that has resulted in a crop of over 100 new Twitter users in Cuba.

Young people are increasingly using Twitter and mobile phones to document repression and voice their opinions. In a world where internet access is highly restricted, tweeting directly by SMS or a “Speak-to-Tweet” platform offers an alternate avenue for communicating with the outside world. The Speak-to-Tweet platform “Háblalo Sin Miedo” (Speak without Fear) enables Cuban residents to call a phone number in the United States and record anonymous messages describing government abuses or other grievances. The messages are automatically converted into posts shared via Twitter and YouTube.⁶¹ At a cost of US \$1.10 per tweet, Háblalo Sin Miedo is expensive; nonetheless, it is proving effective in allowing activists to denounce repressive acts and human rights violations.⁶² Although the government has caught on to the phenomenon, establishing a Twitter presence of its own and blocking two phone numbers that ensure the operation of the “Speak-to-Tweet” platform in October and December 2012, new numbers have since been established.⁶³

⁵⁸ “Blogs Cubanos – Top Alexia Cuba,” *Blogs Cubanos* (blog), January 19, 2013, <http://blogscubanos.wordpress.com/2013/01/19/blogs-cubanos/>.

⁵⁹ Yoani Sanchez's Twitter page, accessed March 22, 2013, <https://twitter.com/#!/yoanisanchez/>; See also: Nelson Acosta and Esteban Israel, “Cuba Unblocks Access to Controversial Blog,” Reuters, February 8, 2011, <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCATRE7175YG20110208>; Monica Medel, “Bloggers Celebrate as Cuba Unblocks Their Sites,” *Journalism in the Americas* (blog), <http://knightcenter.utexas.edu/blog/bloggers-celebrate-cuba-unblocks-their-sites>.

⁶⁰ Jeff Franks, “Castro Daughter, Dissident Blogger Clash on Twitter,” Reuters, November 8, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/09/us-cuba-twitter-castro-idUSTRE7A806Y20111109>.

⁶¹ Háblalo Sin Miedo, “Acerca de” [About us], accessed August, 13, 2012, <http://www.hablalosinmiedo.com/p/como-funciona.html>.

⁶² Tracey Eaton, “Cuban Dissident Blogger Yoani Sanchez Tours the United States,” Florida Center for Investigative Reporting, March 20, 2013, <http://fcir.org/2013/03/20/cuban-dissident-blogger-yoani-sanchez-tours-the-united-states/>.

⁶³ Juan O. Tamayo, “Regimen Cubano Bloquea Llamadas de Denuncia,” *El Nuevo Herald* online, December 7, 2012, <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/2012/12/07/1359290/regimen-cubano-bloquea-llamadas.html>.

VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS

Cuban legal structure is not favorable to internet freedom. Surveillance is widespread and dissident bloggers are subject to punishments ranging from fines and searches to confiscation of equipment and detentions. 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.⁶⁴

The penal code and Law 88, known as the “Clamp Law,” set penalties ranging from a few months to 20 years in prison for any activity considered a “potential risk,” “disturbing the peace,” a “precriminal danger to society,” “counterrevolutionary,” or “against the national independence or economy.”⁶⁵ 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 e-mail messages must not “jeopardize national security.”⁶⁶ In 2007, a network security measure, Resolution 127, banned the use of public data-transmission networks for the spreading of 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. Furthermore, access to internet in Cuba generally requires identification with photo ID, rendering anonymity nearly impossible.

Resolution 56/1999 provides that all materials intended for publication or dissemination on the internet must first be approved by the National Registry of Serial Publications. Resolution 92/2003 prohibits e-mail and other ICT service providers from granting access to individuals who are not approved by the government, and requires that they enable only domestic chat services, not international ones. Entities that violate these regulations can be penalized with suspension or revocation of their authorization to provide access.

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, the privacy of users is frequently violated. Tools of content surveillance are likewise pervasive. Under Resolution 17/2008, ISPs are required to register and retain the addresses of all traffic for at least one year.⁶⁷ The government routes most connections through proxy servers and is able to obtain all user names and passwords through special monitoring software Avila Link, which is installed at most ETECSA and public access points. In addition, delivery of e-mail messages is consistently delayed, and it is not unusual for a message to arrive without its attachments.

⁶⁴ Article 53, available at http://www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const_92_e.htm, accessed July 23, 2010; See also: Article 39, d), available at http://www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const_92_e.htm, accessed July 23, 2010.

⁶⁵ Committee to Protect Journalists, “International Guarantees and Cuban Law,” March 1, 2008, <http://bit.ly/1hbJO4p>.

⁶⁶ Reporters Without Borders, “Going Online in Cuba: Internet under Surveillance,” http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_gb_md_1.pdf.

⁶⁷ “Internet en Cuba: Reglamento para Los Proveedores de Servicios de Acceso a Internet” [Internet in Cuba: Regulations for Internet Service Providers], CubanosUsa.com, December 18, 2008, <http://bit.ly/19NNMfx>.

Under Raúl Castro, the Cuban government appears to have shifted its repressive tactics from long-term imprisonment of bloggers to extralegal detentions, intimidation, and harassment.⁶⁸ In 2005 and 2007, two correspondents for Cubanet were charged with “precriminal social danger” and “subversive propaganda,” and were sentenced to prison terms ranging from four to seven years. Both were released as part of a broader pardon of prisoners in December 2011. Bloggers are still routinely summoned for questioning, reprimanded, and detained, however, and late 2012 ushered in a resurgence of detentions.⁶⁹

On November 7, authorities arrested numerous civil rights activists, including Yoani Sánchez and at least 12 others. Among those detained were Laritza Diversent, an attorney who runs the blog *Jurisconsulto de Cuba*, and Antonio Rodiles, curator of *Estado de Sats*. Diversent and many others were released shortly after detention, but Rodiles was held in police custody for over three weeks. Authorities gave no statement concerning the reason for his release, but Twitter users speculate that it may have been related to the hunger strike he began shortly after his arrest.⁷⁰ As it is very difficult to distinguish between independent blogging and political activism in Cuba, it is impossible to accurately pinpoint which offence triggered the detentions.

Examples of arrests and intimidation of independent journalists and bloggers in Cuba are not hard to find. Calixto Martínez, a prisoner of conscience and journalist for online news site *Hablemos Press*, was arrested for allegedly disrespecting the Castro administration. In accordance with Cuban law, which permits detentions of up to six months without charge, no formal charges were filed against Martínez, who was held in solitary confinement in response to a hunger strike he began after his September 2012 imprisonment.⁷¹ He has since been released. Independent journalist Héctor Julio Cedeño Negrin, detained while photographing police harassment of taxi drivers, was imprisoned for 12 days before being placed under house arrest.⁷²

In March 2012, during the Pope’s visit to Cuba, dozens of bloggers were placed under house arrest or detained and held throughout the Pope’s three-day stay, after which they were released.⁷³ On December 9, 2012, on the eve of International Human Rights Day, some 44 members of the nonviolent opposition group Ladies in White were publicly beaten and arrested, reportedly without

⁶⁸ Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *After the Black Spring, Cuba’s New Repression*, July 6, 2011, <http://www.cpj.org/reports/2011/07/after-the-black-spring-cubas-new-repression.php>.

⁶⁹ Daisy Valera, “This Cuban Woman and Her Online Indiscipline,” *Havana Times* online, March 11, 2012, <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=64077>; Steven L. Taylor, “Cuba vs. the Bloggers,” *PoliBlog*, December 6, 2008, <http://www.poliblogger.com/index.php?s=cuba+bloggers>; Marc Cooper, “Cuba’s Blogger Crackdown,” *Mother Jones*, December 8, 2008, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2008/12/cubas-blogger-crackdown>.

⁷⁰ Biddle, Ellery Roberts “Cuba: Democracy Advocate Rodiles Released; Blogger Diversent Remains Detained,” 5 December 2012, <http://bit.ly/11Qsook>.

⁷¹ Amnesty International Press Release, “Cuban Journalist Named Prisoner of Conscience,” Amnesty.org, January 30, 2013, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/cuban-journalist-named-prisoner-conscience-2013-01-30>; Amnesty International Press Release, “Prisoner of Conscience on Hunger Strike,” Amnesty.org, March 14, 2013, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR25/002/2013/en/f2ef351c-54ab-43cb-a99e-0c39b3e9adab/amr250022013en.html>

⁷² Cuba Democracia y Vida, “Cuban Independent Journalist Hector Ceden Negrin Arrested for Doing His Job,” February 8, 2013, <http://www.cubademocraciayvida.org/web/article.asp?artID=20125>

⁷³ *Hispanically Speaking News* online, “Silenced During Papal Visit, Cuban Bloggers, Dissidents Speak Out” (VIDEO), <http://bit.ly/18zX2H0>.

any sort of provocation.⁷⁴ Although these beatings were related to activism rather than online content, such abuse stands as a warning to the wider community of oppositionists.

In late 2012 and early 2013, online activity continued to be cause for repression. In December 2012, blogger and writer Ángel Santiesteban Prats received a five-year jail sentence on trumped-up charges of “home violation” and “injuries” at the end of a summary trial.⁷⁵ The winner of major literary prizes, Santiesteban was arrested in connection with his political views several times prior to the trial. Such harassment increased after Santiesteban’s creation of the blog “The children no one wanted,” in which he criticized the government. In January 2013, 25 year old blogger Daisy Valera was fired from her post as a nuclear chemist after searching the internet for information on Cuba and posting comments critical of the government on the *Havana Times* platform.⁷⁶

Despite the abuses suffered by dissidents, 2013 brought a notable loosening of travel restrictions. As part of immigration reform, bloggers previously denied exit visas, including Yoani Sánchez, Orlando Luis Pardo, and Eliecer Ávila, were allowed to travel abroad. In early 2013, Sánchez, who was finally permitted to leave Cuba after having been denied an exit visa 21 times in the past five years, began an 80-city, 12-country tour, with the aim of brining awareness to Cuba’s active civil society and blogosphere.⁷⁷ Her speeches have since received international attention.

⁷⁴ John Suarez, “Dozens of Ladies in White and Other Activists Beaten and Arrested Leaving Santa Rita Church Today,” *Cuban Exile Quarter* (blog), Blogspot, December 9, 2012, <http://cubanexilequarter.blogspot.com/2012/12/dozens-of-ladies-in-white-and-other.html>

⁷⁵ Mary Jo Porter and Heffner Chun, site managers, “Angel Santiesteban,” *Translating Cuba: English Translation of Cuban Bloggers*, April 23, 2013, <http://translatingcuba.com/category/authors/angelsantiesteban/>; See also: Angel Santiesteban, “Prison Diary VI: Inside View of the Trial,” *Translating Cuba: English Translation of Cuban Bloggers*, March 28, 2013, <http://translatingcuba.com/prison-diary-vi-the-inside-view-of-the-trial-angel-santiesteban/>.

⁷⁶ Daisy Valera, “Unemployed at 25 in Cuba,” *Havana Times*, January 6, 2013, <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=85460>

⁷⁷ Monika Fabian, “Cuban Dissident Yoani Sanchez on the Power of the Hashtag,” ABC News/Univision Online, March 18, 2013, http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/News/cuban-dissident-yoani-sanchez-embarks-world-tour/story?id=18749528