

CUBA

	2011	2012
INTERNET FREEDOM STATUS	Not Free	Not Free
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	24	24
Limits on Content (0-35)	30	29
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	33	33
Total (0-100)	87	86

* 0=most free, 100=least free

POPULATION: 11 million
INTERNET PENETRATION 2011: 5 percent
WEB 2.0 APPLICATIONS BLOCKED: Yes
NOTABLE POLITICAL CENSORSHIP: Yes
BLOGGERS/I USERS ARRESTED: Yes
PRESS FREEDOM STATUS: Not Free

INTRODUCTION

Despite a slight loosening of restrictions on the sale of computers in 2008 and the important growth of mobile-phone usage in 2011, Cuba remains one of the world's most repressive environments for the internet and other information and communication technologies (ICTs). There is practically no access to internet applications other than email, given the slowness of the country's connectivity and high prices, and most users are restricted to an intranet for obtaining information. Hopes that a new fiber-optic cable announced in early 2011 would soon dramatically increase speeds were dashed a year later, as the project was engulfed with official silence and speculations about corruption. Surveillance is extensive, including special software designed to monitor and control many of the island's public internet access points.¹ 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. In a positive development, access to many blogs was unblocked in early 2011, though they continued to be subjected to periodic travel bans and stints of arbitrary detention.

Cuba was connected to the internet for the first time in 1996, and the National Center for Automated Interchange of Information (CENIAI), the country's first internet service provider (ISP), was established that year. However, the executive authorities continue to

¹ "Prestaciones efectivas para redes informáticas" [Effective Features for Computer Networks], Radio Surco, 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://cpj.org/blog/2010/06/the-malware-lockdown-in-havana-and-hanoi.php>.

control the legal and institutional structures that decide who has access to the internet and how much access will be permitted.²

OBSTACLES TO ACCESS

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 However, the vast majority of internet users are only able to connect to a government intranet rather than the internet proper. Experts estimate that about 5 percent of Cubans periodically have access to the worldwide web via black market sales of minutes by those permitted to have such accounts.⁴

The Cuban government maintains tight control over the sale and distribution of internet-related equipment. After a nearly decade-long ban, in early 2008, the government began allowing Cubans to buy personal computers, and some individuals can now legally connect to an ISP with a government permit. However, this permit is granted only to certain people, mostly Cuban officials or “trusted journalists.” 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 enterprises or organizations are creating new websites.⁵

One segment of the population that enjoys approved access to the internet is the professional class of doctors, professors, and government officials. Facilities like hospitals, research institutions, and local doctors’ offices are linked by an online network called Infomed. Home connections are not yet allowed for the vast majority of Cubans and only those favored by the government are able to access the internet from their own homes. However, even these users are typically restricted to e-mail and sites related to their occupations. For example, students at the Latin American School of Medicine in Havana are reportedly granted 40 minutes a week of internet access. During this time, students

² Ben Corbett, *This Is Cuba: An Outlaw Culture Survives* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2002), 145.

³ National 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://www.one.cu/publicaciones/06turismoycomercio/TIC%20en%20Cifras%20Cuba%202011/TIC%20en%20Cifras%20Cuba%202011.pdf>.

⁴ “In Cuba Mystery Shrouds Fate of Internet Cable,” *Emerging Frontiers* (blog), May 23, 2012, <http://emergingfrontiersblog.com/2012/05/23/in-cuba-mystery-shrouds-fate-of-internet-cable/>.

⁵ 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>.

furiously upload pre-drafted emails and copy-paste content from their inbox to read later. Conducting online research or accessing academic journals is unfeasible.⁶

Most individuals who are able to access the internet face extremely slow connections, making the use of multimedia applications nearly impossible. In January 2010, the government announced that it had expanded the national bandwidth and achieved a 10 percent increase in international connectivity. According to official data, Cuba now has speeds of 209 Mbps for downloading and 379 Mbps for uploading.⁷ However, once this national bandwidth is divided among even a small number of users, average speeds are still extremely slow.⁸ Access over the intranet is similarly slow due to the weak domestic infrastructure.

In November 2010, the government announced that a fiber-optic cable was being installed between Cuba, Venezuela, and Jamaica, at a cost of approximately US\$72 million, to improve the island's internet connection.⁹ In February 2011, officials celebrated the arrival of the 1,600km (1,000 mile) cable laid by a consortium that included France's Alcatel-Lucent. Once fully connected, the cable is expected to increase data-transmission speeds 3,000-fold.¹⁰ Nonetheless, experts say that even when the cable becomes active, the country's internal networks will need to be upgraded if average citizens are to have high-speed access. Many speculate that the first to benefit will be the limited few professional institutions and government offices that have relatively better access today.¹¹

Over one year after the cable's reported connection, however, there is no sign of it functioning for public use, nor an official explanation for the delay. Rumors swirl about technical problems or corruption scandals.¹² Some observers speculate that the Cuban

⁶ Graham Sowa, "Why Students in Cuba Need Internet," Havana Times, May 23, 2011, <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=44073>.

⁷ Amaury E. del Valle, "Cuba, la red sigue creciendo" [Cuba, the Network Continues to Grow], Juventud Rebelde, January 6, 2010, <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/suplementos/informatica/2010-01-06/cuba-la-red-sigue-creciendo/>.

⁸ 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://www.ascecuba.org/publications/proceedings/volume21/pdfs/press.pdf>.

⁹ "Cable de fibra óptica une Venezuela, Cuba y Jamaica" [Fiber Optic Cable unites Venezuela, Cuba, and Jamaica], Ministerio de Educación Superior, accessed August 13, 2012, http://www.mes.edu.cu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=82:cable-de-fibra-optica-une-venezuela-cuba-y-jamaica-&catid=1:ultimas-noticias&Itemid=25; "Llega a Cuba el cable submarino de fibra óptica para ofrecer internet de banda ancha" [Underwater Fiber Optic Cable Arrives in Cuba to Offer Broad Band Internet], El País, February 10, 2011, http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2011/02/10/actualidad/1297292404_850215.html.

¹⁰ Curt Hopkins, "Cuba's Internet Capacity to Increase 3,000x," ReadWriteWeb (blog), February 13, 2011, http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/cubas_internet_capacity_increased_by_3000_percent.php; International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "ITU hails connectivity boost for Cuba," news release, February 11, 2011, http://www.itu.int/net/pressoffice/press_releases/2011/CM03.aspx.

¹¹ Press, "Past, Present, and Future of the Internet in Cuba."

¹² "In Cuba Mystery Shrouds Fate of Internet Cable."

authorities have been spooked by the role of social media in the Arab Spring protests and decided to delay increasing access.¹³ Another credible hypothesis is that the Cuban authorities are preparing to replace their current internet control strategy that is based on limiting access with a new model of monitoring, filtering, censored copycats of sites like Facebook, and increased activity by progovernment bloggers. As the latter mechanisms are not yet fully in place, the government is delaying opening up connectivity.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the 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 is limited in the space it can buy. However, President Barack Obama eased some aspects of Washington's prolonged trade sanctions in 2009 when he allowed U.S. telecommunications firms to enter into agreements to establish fiber-optic cable and satellite telecommunication facilities linking the United States and Cuba and to enter into roaming agreements with Cuban providers.¹⁵ Cuba's leaders reiterated their demand for a complete end to the embargo, and official media ignored this important change in the U.S. legal framework. The bilateral relationship was affected by another incident in 2009 that touched directly on the lack of open internet access in Cuba. On December 4, the Cuban authorities arrested an American independent contractor, Alan Gross, 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."¹⁶

High costs also put internet access beyond the reach of most of the population. A simple computer with a monitor averages around 722 convertible pesos (US\$722) in retail outlets, or at least 550 convertible pesos (US\$550) on the black market.¹⁷ By comparison, the

¹³ Nick Miroff, "In Cuba, Dial-Up Internet Is A Luxury," National Public Radio, December 14, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/12/14/143721874/in-cuba-dial-up-internet-is-a-luxury>; "In Cuba Mystery Shrouds Fate of Internet Cable."

¹⁴ In May 2012, Venezuela's science and technology minister told media that the cable was operational, but that it was up to the Cuban government how 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 maybe be using the cable, including to provide access for Venezuelan officials to Cuban government databases, while deliberately postponing having the cable benefit average users. "Venezuela: Fiber-optic cable to Cuba is working," Bloomberg 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>.

¹⁵ "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.

¹⁶ 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/>.

¹⁷ Will Weissert, "Cubans Queue for Computers as PC Ban Lifted, But Web Still Outlawed," Irish Examiner, May 5, 2008, <http://www.irishexaminer.com/archives/2008/0505/world/cubans-queue-for-computers-as-pc-ban-lifted-but-web-still-outlawed-61940.html>.

average monthly Cuban salary is approximately 16 convertible pesos (US\$16).¹⁸ Computers are generally distributed by the state-run Copextel Corporation, which imports ICT equipment. Approximately 31 percent of Cubans report having access to a computer, but 85 percent of those said that the computers were located at work or school.¹⁹ An internet connection in a hotel costs between 6 and 12 convertible pesos per hour.

Cuba still has the lowest mobile phone penetration rate in Latin America, but the number is rising fast. According to official reports, as of the end of 2011, 1.3 million Cubans—about 11 percent of the population—had a mobile phone,²⁰ a dramatic increase since 2009 when that figure was approximately 443,000.²¹ The government eased restrictions on mobile phone purchases in March 2008, and during 2011 reduced the sign-up fee by more than half, though it still represents three months' wages for an average worker. Beginning in February 2012, the cost of a text message was halved and receiving phone calls from within Cuba was made free (previously, both caller and receiver paid a charge).²²

Cuba has roaming agreements with 330 carriers in 135 countries, and 2.2 million people used those services in Cuba in 2010.²³ The island's mobile network reportedly covers 78 percent of Cuban territory, and further expansions are planned.²⁴ Most mobile phones do not include internet connections, but it is possible to send and receive international text messages and photographs with certain phones. Cuban customs regulations specifically

¹⁸ "Mobile Phone Use Booms in Cuba Following Easing of Restrictions," Agence France-Presse, April 24, 2008.

¹⁹ 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://www.one.cu/publicaciones/06turismoycomercio/TIC%20en%20Cifras%20Cuba%202009/TIC%20en%20Cifras%20Cuba%202009.pdf>.

²⁰ 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>; "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>; "Cuban cellphones hit 1 million, Net access lags," Reuters, July 7, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/07/us-cuba-telecom-idUSTRE76661920110707>; Amaury E. del Valle, "Cuba aumenta cantidad de teléfonos fijos y móviles" [Cuba Increases Quantity of Fixed and Mobile Telephones], Juventud Rebelde, December 26, 2011, <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/ciencia-tecnica/2011-12-26/cuba-aumenta-cantidad-de-telefonos-fijos-y-moviles/>.

²¹ International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "Mobile-cellular telephone subscriptions," 2011, accessed July 13, 2012, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx#>. A good analysis of this dramatic increase and its economic benefits (in Spanish) in Emilio Morales, "Cuba: teléfonos celulares y llamadas costosas" [Cuba: cellphones and expensive calls], Café Fuerte, January 17, 2012, <http://cafeuerte.com/cuba/noticias-de-cuba/economia-y-negocios/1474-cuba-telefonos-celulares-y-llamadas-costosas>.

²² "Telecoms in Cuba. Talk is cheap," Americas View (blog), The Economist, January 24, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/americasview/2012/01/telecoms-cuba>.

²³ "Syniverse holding back \$2.5m in Cuban roaming charges," Cubastandard.com, October 21, 2011, <http://www.cubastandard.com/2011/10/21/syniverse-holding-back-2-5m-in-cuban-roaming-charges/>.

²⁴ Nick Mirotff, "Getting Cell Phones Into Cuban Hands," Global Post, May 17, 2010, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/cuba/100514/cell-phone>.

prohibit the entry of any phones that use the Global Position System (GPS) or satellite connections.²⁵

The government divides access to web technology between the national intranet and the global internet. Most Cubans only have access to the former, which consists of a national email 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.²⁶ Cubans can legally access the internet only through government-approved institutions, such as the approximately 600 Joven Clubs de Computación (Youth Computer Clubs) and points of access run by ETECSA.²⁷ Users are generally required to present identification to use computers at these sites. Some neighborhoods in the main cities of Havana and Santiago advertise “internet” access in ETECSA kiosks, but field research has found that the kiosks often lack computers, instead offering public phones for local and international calls with prepaid phone cards. The government also claims that all schools have computer laboratories, while in practice internet access is usually prohibited for students or limited to email, supervised activities on the national intranet, or very short periods of access. 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.²⁸ Since then, a small number have been slowly established.

Despite all of these barriers, Cubans still connect to the internet through both authorized and unauthorized points of access. Some are able to break through the 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 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 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.

There are only two ISPs, CENIAI Internet and ETECSA, and both are owned by the state, though previously Telecom Italia was one of the latter’s shareholders. In February 2011, the state-owned company Rafin S.A., a financial firm known for its connections to the military,

²⁵ See the website of Aduana General de la Republica de Cuba [Cuban Customs]: <http://www.aduana.co.cu/turista.htm>.

²⁶ ETECSA: Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A., accessed August 28, 2010, <http://www.etecsa.cu/>.

²⁷ See the club system’s website at <http://www.cfg.jovenclub.cu/>.

²⁸ Resolution No. 99/2009 was published in the Official Gazette on June 29, 2009.

bought Telecom Italia's 27 percent stake in ETECSA for US\$706 million.²⁹ 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. The government has used its control the cell phone network to selectively obstruct citizens' communications at politically sensitive times. Most recently, during the visit to the island of Pope Benedict XVI in March 2012, bloggers and dissidents reported that their cell phones were not working.³⁰ One independent journalist who investigated the situation found that calls were being automatically redirected to a phone number belonging to the Ministry of Interior.³¹

In 2000, the Ministry of Information Science and Communication was created to serve as the regulatory authority for the internet, and its Cuban Supervision and Control Agency oversees the development of internet-related technologies.³²

LIMITS ON CONTENT

Rather than engaging in the technically sophisticated blocking and filtering used by other repressive regimes in countries like China, Cuban authorities rely heavily on lack of technology and prohibitive costs to limit users' access to information. The websites of foreign news outlets—including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *Le Monde*, and *El Nuevo Herald* (a Miami-based Spanish-language daily)—and human rights groups like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Freedom House remain largely accessible, though slow connection speeds impede access to the content on these sites.³³

Nevertheless, beginning in 2007, the government systematically blocked core internet portal sites such as Yahoo, MSN, and Hotmail. In addition, until early 2011, the Cuban authorities had blocked access to websites and blogs run by individuals both inside and outside the country that contained independent reporting or views critical of the government. In February 2011, however, most of these blogs and international portals were unblocked for Cuban users accessing the worldwide web rather than the intranet. The group included the *Bitácora Cubana* blog and the *Voces Cubana* platform that hosts approximately

²⁹ 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-etecs-stake-to-rafin-sa-for-706-million.html>.

³⁰ "Silenced During Papal Visit, Cuban Bloggers, Dissidents Speak Out (VIDEO)," Hispanically Speaking News, April 7, 2012, <http://www.hispanicallyspeakingnews.com/noticias-de-noticias/details/silenced-during-papal-visit-cuban-bloggers-dissidents-speak-out-video/15038/>.

³¹ Juan O. Tamayo, "Cuba diverts dissidents' phone numbers in pope crackdown," The Miami Herald, March 30, 2012, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/03/30/2723658/cubas-interior-ministry-left-fingerprint.html>.

³² The ministry's website can be found at <http://www.mic.gov.cu/>.

³³ Reporters Without Borders, "Free Expression Must Go With Better Communications, Says Reporters Without Borders as Blogs Prove Hard to Access," news release, March 31, 2008, <http://en.rsf.org/cuba-free-expression-must-go-with-31-03-2008,26396.html>.

40 blogs, including Yoani Sánchez's well-known Generación Y blog, which reportedly draws 26 percent of its readers from within Cuba.³⁴ No official explanation was offered for the sudden unblocking, but it remained in effect as of May 2012.

Some websites, such as Cubanet (run by an independent journalist in Cuba but hosted on overseas servers), Payolibre (a dissident news website), and the Association for Freedom of the Press remain inaccessible from government-sponsored youth computer centers.³⁵ In addition, Revolico, a platform for posting classified advertisements, continues to be blocked, despite the apolitical nature of its content.³⁶ Moreover, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) remains blocked in Cuba, with the exception of unauthorized points of connection in old Havana. Some social-networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are accessible from university cybercafes and other locations, although with varying consistency. Most Cuban Twitter users access the microblogging service from a computer rather than a mobile phone and the cost of sending a message is approximately US\$1, more than the average daily income.

Resolution 179 from 2008 requires ISPs to censor a range of vaguely defined materials. It specifically 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." In practice, ETECSA does not proactively police the networks and delete content. However, some bloggers have reportedly removed certain posts criticizing government actions, apparently after receiving threats from officials.³⁷

It is a crime to contribute to international media that are not supportive of the government, a fact that has led to widespread self-censorship. Cuban blogs typically feature implicit or explicit instances of self-censorship and anonymity. Many of those working with ICTs are journalists who have been barred from official employment, and the prohibitive costs surrounding the technology represent a major obstacle for them. The majority of their work is done offline by hand, typewriter, or computer, then uploaded and published once or

³⁴ 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>.

³⁵ Bitácora Cubana can be found at <http://cubabit.blogspot.com/>; Asociación pro Libertad de Prensa (the Association for Freedom of the Press) can be found at <http://prolibertadprensa.blogspot.com/>.

³⁶ Marc Lacey, "A Black Market Finds a Home in the Web's Back Alleys," New York Times, 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://www.boston.com/news/world/latinamerica/articles/2012/06/16/cubas_next_step_on_capitalist_road_advertising/.

³⁷ See for example: <http://cafefuerte.com/cuba/noticias-de-cuba/sociedad/2050-malestar-por-cambio-de-edificio-del-partido-comunista-en-camagueey>, and <http://elyuma.blogspot.com.es/2012/07/ljc-orwellian-memory-hole-google-cache.html>.

twice a week using a paid internet access card. For those contributing to international outlets, content can be dictated via costly international phone calls.

There is no exact count of blogs produced in Cuba, but the Cuban Journalists' Union (UPEC) has reported a current total of 174, including sites like Retazos and Convivencia. Independent websites hosted outside the country like La Polemica Digital, Havana Times, or Estado de Sats provide the few able to access the net with a more differentiated and rich selection of news sources than is available from state-run media. Regional radio stations and magazines are also creating online versions, though these are state-run and do not accept contributions from independent journalists. However, in a recent development, some of these official sites have installed commentary tools that allow readers to provide feedback and foster discussion, albeit censored.

In recent years, Yoani Sánchez has become the most visible figure in an independent blogging movement that uses new media to report on daily life and conditions in Cuba that violate basic freedoms. She 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 ignore, earning broad support throughout society. They have made it “trendy” to exercise the right to free expression.

Young people are increasingly using the Twitter microblogging service and mobile phones to document repression, voice their opinions, and spread leaks of prohibited information. These have included details exposing government corruption or other abuses. For example, the “Hablalo Sin Miedo” (Speak without Fear) platform 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 then automatically converted into posts shared via Twitter and YouTube.³⁸ In a rare incident, in November 2011, Yoani Sánchez and other activists had a direct, unfiltered exchange of views with Mariela Castro, the daughter of President Raul Castro, during which the latter referred to the bloggers as “despicable parasites.”³⁹ As of June 2012, Sánchez’s followers on Twitter totaled over 260,000, though only a small percentage were from within Cuba.⁴⁰

Unable to completely suppress dissident activity on the internet through legal and infrastructural constraints, the authorities have taken a number of countermeasures. First,

³⁸ “Acerca de” [About us], Háblalo Sin Miedo, accessed on August, 13, 2012, <http://www.hablalasinmiedo.com/p/como-funciona.html>.

³⁹ 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>.

⁴⁰ Yoani Sanchez’s twitter page, accessed August 13, 2012, <https://twitter.com/#!/yoanisanchez/>.

they have sought to dominate conversations within the medium itself. Government entities maintain a major presence on social networks, and they rely on trusted students at the University of Computer Sciences to help fight the “internet campaigns against Cuba.” The authorities have also created official blogs designed to slander and criticize the independent bloggers.⁴¹ According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the government announced in February 2011 that it had recruited about 1,000 such bloggers.⁴² These bloggers often accuse government critics of being financed by the U.S. government or post damaging rumors about their personal lives. In February 2011, an apparently leaked video of a Cuban government expert giving a room of intelligence agents a crash course on social media was uploaded to the internet.⁴³ In the video, the lecturer emphasizes how these new technologies are being used around the world by activists and warns that bloggers such as Yoani Sánchez have become well-known on Twitter and could organize protests in Havana similar to those that occurred in Iran in 2009. He concludes by saying the government must respond to these threats.

Second, the government has launched its own versions of popular websites, such as Facebook and Wikipedia, though with little success. The online encyclopedia Ecured, unveiled in December 2010, uses similar software and layout as its international counterpart. However, a cursory review indicates that only a small number of people update it, 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 a “.edu” or Gmail email account were reportedly rejected.⁴⁴ More recently, in December 2011, a social-networking website called Red Social was launched. Its layout uncannily matched Facebook to the point that some observers questioned whether it was a violation of copyright. The site was accessible only from Cuba’s intranet, though according to one local blogger, shortly after its launch, it appeared to no longer be functioning, possibly a reflection of the lack of server capacity to maintain it.⁴⁵

⁴¹ A few examples include Cambios en Cuba, <http://cambiosencuba.blogspot.com/>; Yohandry’s blog, <http://yohandry.wordpress.com/>; and the official bloggers platform CubaSí, <http://www.cubasi.cu>.

⁴² 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>.

⁴³ The video (more than 53,000 views) on Vimeo: “La ciber policia en Cuba” [The cyber police in Cuba], Vimeo video, 53:08, posted by “Coral Negro,” January 31, 2011, <http://vimeo.com/19402730>; English transcription: <http://translatingcuba.com/?p=7111>; the identification process: “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/>.

⁴⁴ Larry 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>.

⁴⁵ “The Cuban Facebook Imitation Saga – Red Social (Social Facebook),” The Philandrist (blog), December 6, 2011, <http://thephilandrist.wordpress.com/2011/12/06/the-cuban-facebook-imitation-saga-redsocial/>.

VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS

The legal structure in Cuba is not favorable to internet freedom. The constitution explicitly subordinates freedom of speech to the objectives of a socialist society,⁴⁶ and freedom of cultural expression is guaranteed only if the expression is not contrary to the Revolution.⁴⁷ The penal code and Law 88 set penalties ranging from a few months to 20 years in prison for any activities that are considered a “potential risk,” “disturbing the peace,” a “precriminal danger to society,” “counterrevolutionary,” or “against the national independence or economy.”⁴⁸

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 email messages must not “jeopardize national security.”⁴⁹ In 2007, Resolution 127 on network security banned the spreading via public data-transmission networks 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 will enable them to detect and prevent the proscribed activities, and to report them to the relevant authorities.

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. Moreover, Resolution 92/2003 prohibits email 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 have their authorization to provide access suspended or revoked.

Despite constitutional provisions that protect various forms of communication, and portions of the penal code that set penalties for the violation of the secrecy of communications, the privacy of users is frequently violated in practice. Tools of content surveillance are pervasive, from public access points and universities to government offices. Resolution 17/2008, which spells out the conditions and procedures to become an ISP, requires ISPs to register and retain the addresses of all traffic for at least a year.⁵⁰ The government also 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

⁴⁶ Article 53, available at http://www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const_92_e.htm, accessed July 23, 2010.

⁴⁷ Article 39, d), available at http://www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const_92_e.htm, accessed July 23, 2010.

⁴⁸ “International Guarantees and Cuban Law,” Committee to Protect Journalists, March 1, 2008, <http://cpj.org/reports/2008/03/laws.php>.

⁴⁹ Reporters Without Borders, “Going online in Cuba: Internet under surveillance,” http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_gb_md_1.pdf.

⁵⁰ “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://cubanosusa.com/opinion/editorial/42454-internet-en-cuba-reglamento-proveedores-acceso-internet.html>.

ETECSA and public access points. In addition, delivery of email messages is consistently delayed, and it is not unusual for a message to arrive without its attachments.

The government continues to repress independent journalism and blogging with detentions, fines, searches, and confiscation of money and equipment. There have been a few cases in which online journalists were imprisoned for their work, most notably two correspondents for Cubanet. One of them was sentenced to four years in prison in April 2007 for “precriminal social danger,” and the other was sentenced to seven years in November 2005 for “subversive propaganda.” Both were released as part of a broader pardon of prisoners in December 2011.

Under Raul Castro, the Cuban government appears to have shifted its repressive tactics from long-term imprisonment to extralegal detentions, intimidation, and harassment.⁵¹ Bloggers have been summoned for questioning, reprimanded, and had their domestic and international travel rights restricted.⁵² In October 2011, Dania Virgen García, a blogger and journalist, was reportedly detained and beaten along with her husband when trying to visit the home of the late Laura Pollán shortly after the founder of the opposition group Ladies in White passed away; the pair was released within a few days.⁵³ 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, then released.⁵⁴ In February 2011, the Cuban government denied Yoani Sánchez an exit permit for the 19th time in four years.⁵⁵ That same month, student Reyner Agüero was expelled from the University of Information Sciences for giving an interview to an anti-Castro blog. The document affirming his three-year expulsion explained that the reason was “unauthorized use of the ...information technologies that were provided at no cost by the institution for [students’] studies.”⁵⁶

⁵¹ Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *After the Black Spring, Cuba’s New Repression*.

⁵² Daisy Valera, “This Cuban Woman and Her Online Indiscipline,” Havana Times, 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>.

⁵³ David Águila Montero, “Golpeada y detenida Dania Virgen” [Beaten and Detained Dania Virgen], Payolibre.com, October 19, 2011, <http://www.payolibre.com/noticias/noticias2.php?id=8304>; Marc R. Masferrer, “Cuban independent journalist/blogger Dania Virgen Garcia beaten, arrested (UPDATED x 2),” Uncommon Sense (blog), October 21, 2011, http://marcmassferrer.typepad.com/uncommon_sense/2011/10/cuba-independent-journalistblogger-dania-virgen-garcia-beaten-arrested.html.

⁵⁴ Silenced During Papal Visit, Cuban Bloggers, Dissidents Speak Out (VIDEO),” Hispanically Speaking News.

⁵⁵ “Cuban blogger blocked from travelling to film premiere in Brazil,” Amnesty International, February 6, 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/cuban-blogger-blocked-travelling-film-premiere-brazil-2012-02-06>.

⁵⁶ Gif of document linked here: <http://www.penultimosdias.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/documento.gif>.