

**Cuba**

# *Ethnicity in Cuba*

## *Group selection*

According to the 2012 Census, 9.3% of Cuban population identify as black, 26.6% as mestizo (also including mulattos, who make up the majority of this group) and 64.1% as white (<sup>1551</sup>). Ethnic discussions in Cuba are dominated by a Black-White differentiation and mulattos face similar problems as the black population (<sup>1552</sup>, <sup>1553</sup>). We identify **Afro-Cubans** and **Whites** as politically relevant ethnic groups, including mestizos/mulattoes in the Afro-Cuban group.

<sup>1551</sup> [ONEI, 2013]

<sup>1552</sup> [Fuente, 2000]

<sup>1553</sup> [Schmidt, 2008]

It is important to keep in mind that according to the last National Census in 2012, Cubans seemingly prefer to self-identify as “white” rather than “mestizo/mulatto” (or the government prefers white identifications) in a context of widespread internalized racism and the entrenched stigma around ethnicity. Additionally, percentage estimates of African descent vary a lot and are likely to under-report black and mestizo populations. Indeed, other assessments suggest that Afro-Cubans and mestizo represent two thirds of the total population (<sup>1554</sup>).

<sup>1554</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2020]

## *Power relations*

### *1946-1959*

Ethnicity only played a more significant part in Cuban politics until Castro’s revolution which came to an end in 1959. During the era of slavery in the plantation society, Afro-Cubans formed the lowest strata of Cuban society.

Until 1959, Cuban politics were dominated by a small, upper-class white circle. While non-whites were excluded from membership in the clubs of Cuba’s ruling class (<sup>1555</sup>), during Batista’s authoritarian regime (1952-1959) two Afro-Cubans were appointed to his cabinet one of them as minister of justice and the other one as minister without portfolio (<sup>1556</sup>, 244). Even though the presence of Afro-Cubans was rather limited in Batista’s administration, it gave to them the opportunity to exercise some influence in governmental decision and support the Afro-Cuban clubs.

<sup>1555</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2020]

<sup>1556</sup> [Fuente, 2011]

Therefore, between 1946 and 1959, Whites are coded as “Dominant” and Afro-Cubans as “Powerless”, provided that their political inclusion remained limited and that the Cuban state failed to enact a constitutional mandate for racial equality (<sup>1557</sup>, 247).

<sup>1557</sup> [Fuente, 2011]

According to the last pre-revolutionary census from January 1959,

about 73% of the total population was white and 27% non-whites (where 12.4% are Afro-Cubans and 14.5% mestizo) (<sup>1558</sup>, <sup>1559</sup>).

<sup>1558</sup> [ONEI, 2019]

<sup>1559</sup> [ONEI, n.d.]

### 1960-2021

After the revolution, Castro implemented anti-discrimination measures and declared the ethnicity/race problem as solved; ethnicity is no longer coded as relevant from this point on. Indeed, people's sense of ethnic identity weakened and a more overarching Cuban identity formed, and Afro-Cubans certainly benefited from the wide-reaching economic and social reforms in post-revolution Cuba (<sup>1560</sup>, 343-4; <sup>1561</sup>). The traditional white elite was replaced by a more representative government (<sup>1562</sup>, 344). At the same time, Afro-Cubans were (and still are) underrepresented in the higher echelons of the ruling Communist Party and the Civil Service. Likewise, the World Directory of Minorities does not list a single organization for Afro-Cubans in its account of Minority Based & Advocacy Organizations (<sup>1563</sup>).

<sup>1560</sup> [Levinson, 1998]

<sup>1561</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2011]

<sup>1562</sup> [Levinson, 1998]

<sup>1563</sup> [Minority Rights Group International, 2011]

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s significantly affected the Cuban economy. Meanwhile, racial discrimination and racist discourses gained in prominence, visibility and acceptability (<sup>1564</sup>, 699); by the end of the 1990s, Cuban leaders acknowledged the existence of ethnic differences in Cuban society. In a surprising election outcomes in the 2008 National Assembly elections, where 35% of the elected representatives were Afro-Cubans or mulattoes, though race was not stressed in the discourse around the election (<sup>1565</sup>, 718). Ethnic mobilization/representation is hardly possible in the absence not only of political movements but civil society in general. (The World Directory of Minorities does not list a single organization for Afro-Cubans in its - usually opulent - account of Minority Based & Advocacy Organizations .) Discourses of racial discrimination are confined to side spots (like arts) (World Directory of Minorities - MRGI).

<sup>1564</sup> [Fuente, 2008]

<sup>1565</sup> [Fuente, 2008]

The death of Fidel Castro did not significantly alter the (in)significance of ethnicity in the political system and political discourse. Cuba's main cleavage is still about political loyalty to the ruling socialist system rather than about ethnicity (<sup>1566</sup>, 25). Yet, in recent years increased inequality between whites and Afro-Cubans - partly attributed to the economic reform - and continuing political underrepresentation of the latter is observed in some sources (<sup>1567</sup>, 21, 25; <sup>1568</sup>). Reported discrimination against black people in the context of job opportunities, mainly in the highly paid tourism sector (see <sup>1569</sup>: 21; <sup>1570</sup>, 25), could further enhance ethnic division in the future.

<sup>1566</sup> [BTI, 2016]

<sup>1567</sup> [BTI, 2016]

<sup>1568</sup> [Freedom House, 2017]

<sup>1569</sup> [BTI, 2016]

<sup>1570</sup> [USDS, 2017]

<sup>1571</sup> [BTI, 2020]

According to the most recent BTI (<sup>1571</sup>) report on Cuba, social cleavages and racial inequalities are becoming more visible especially in urban areas, this is due in part to the reappearance of the social class phenomenon. While this issue has not been politicized in the island, the anger and frustration among the Afro-Cubans (in particular the poor and working-class) is increasing.

At last, in 2018 a new National Assembly was elected. The composition of this new Assembly reflects more diversity and generational changes, where almost half of the elected deputies are women and where 41% are Afro-Cuban (<sup>1572</sup>,268). Moreover, this new government is composed of three Afro-Cuban vice presidents of the ruling Council out of six, including the First Vice President.

<sup>1572</sup> [Castro and Brenner, 2019]

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*Political status of ethnic groups in Cuba*

*From 1946 until 1959*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Whites	0.73	DOMINANT
Afro-Cubans	0.27	POWERLESS

*From 1960 until 2021*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Whites	0.641	IRRELEVANT
Afro-Cubans	0.359	IRRELEVANT



Figure 292: Political status of ethnic groups in Cuba during 1946-1959.

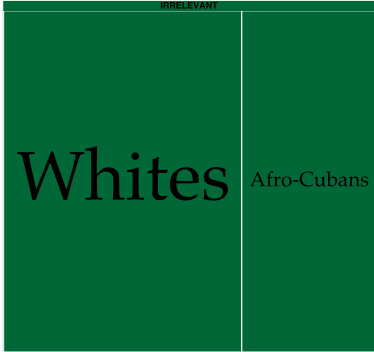


Figure 293: Political status of ethnic groups in Cuba during 1960-2021.

## *Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Cuba*

*From 1946 until 1959*



Figure 294: Map of ethnic groups in Cuba during 1946-1959.

	Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
■	Whites	109 098	Statewide
■	Afro-Cubans	109 098	Statewide

Table 99: List of ethnic groups in Cuba during 1946-1959.



## *Conflicts in Cuba*

*Starting on 1953-07-25*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Cuba	M-26-7		1953-07-25			
Government of Cuba	Cuban Revolutionary Council		1961-04-16			