
Cuba

- ✓ **Should the U.S. lift the trade embargo on Cuba?**
- ✓ **Should the U.S. return Guantanamo Bay Naval Base to Cuba?**
- ✓ **Why are Americans more open to ending the embargo than in the past?**

Facts

Population: 11 million (2015 est.).

GDP: \$77.1 billion (2013 est.).

Leaders: Raúl Castro, 85, first secretary of the Communist Party and president of Cuba.

Important Dates.

1898: The Spanish-American War ends Spanish control of Cuba.

1959: Fidel Castro, leader of the Cuban Revolution, seizes power from U.S.-supported dictator Fulgencio Batista.

1960–62: After the fall of Batista, the U.S. signs the Cuban trade embargo. This is followed by the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, the formal alliance of Cuba with the USSR and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

1990s: Cuba enters a deep economic depression after the collapse of the USSR. The U.S. signs the Helms-Burton Act, which expands the Cuban trade embargo.

2015–2016: The U.S. and Cuba reopen diplomatic relations after a historic meeting between Barack Obama and Raúl Castro. Obama visits Cuba, making him the first U.S. president to do so since the Cuban Revolution.

Foreign Relations and Trade.

Since 1959, Cuba has aligned itself in opposition to the U.S. in Latin America, regularly supporting various communist groups in revolts against U.S.-backed leaders. Cuba was long supported economically by the U.S.S.R, but struggled after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. The country has since established strong ties with Russia under Vladimir Putin. Cuba also has strong relations with socialist powers in Latin American countries, especially with Venezuela.

Current U.S. Policies

Cuban Trade Embargo.

Signed after the establishment of the Communist government in Cuba, the U.S. embargo banned most exports from Cuba, excepting certain products. The embargo was expanded by the Cuban Assets Control Regulations of 1963, the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the Helms–Burton Act of 1996 to encompass all trade between the two countries and end diplomatic relations.

The embargo has led to a strained and distrustful relationship between the U.S. and Cuba. The UN General Assembly criticizes the embargo as a show of unnecessary force against the island’s economy. The U.S.-operated Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, located in Cuba, has also been a longstanding source of tension between the countries.

President Barack Obama has championed efforts to normalize relations between Cuba and the U.S., flying to Havana to meet with Raúl Castro, reopening the embassies in the two countries and publicly calling for an end to the embargo. Congress continues to ignore these calls, but public sentiment seems to favor normalized relations, and in early 2016 the president presented Congress with a new plan to close the detention facility. The Obama administration is not considering plans to return the Naval Base to the Cubans.

Candidate Positions



Hillary Clinton is in favor of normalized Cuba-U.S. relations. As president, she would push for an end to the economic embargo, employing executive authority if necessary.

Serving as first lady, Mrs. Clinton supported the Helms-Burton Act of 1996. During her 2008 presidential campaign, she again spoke in favor of the embargo and challenged Cuba on its human rights record. As secretary of state, Mrs. Clinton shifted her position. She spearheaded the campaign to normalize relations, and promoted President Obama’s call to loosen travel and trade restrictions against the country. In 2014, she responded to the administration’s announcement that it would begin to normalize relations, saying, “Our decades-long policy of isolation has only strengthened the Castro regime’s grip on power.”



Donald Trump calls for an end to the U.S. embargo on Cuba—a position contrary to that of many in the Republican Party establishment—but says he would keep Guantanamo Bay detention center open. Mr. Trump approves of normalized diplomatic relations, with the caveat that he would have “made a better deal” than the Obama administration. He has expressed that lifting the embargo would do more to improve human rights in Cuba than leaving it in place.

This is a change from the candidate's stance during his brief Reform Party presidential bid in 1999. In an op-ed for the *Miami Herald* at the time, he wrote against lifting the economic embargo, citing the Castro regime's human rights record as the reason he had declined to join European investors in developing real estate on the island.

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