

Democracy

A Cuba Solidarity Campaign Fact sheet 2015



Before the Revolution

In 1959 the Cuban Revolution defeated dictator, Fulgencio Batista, and his corrupt and unpopular government was ousted by the Cuban people. Batista had seized power in a military coup in 1952 and promptly cancelled elections. Opponents of Batista were harassed, imprisoned and assassinated. US mafia gangsters like Meyer Lansky and Lucky Luciano worked in tandem with Batista, his supporters, the US government and big business to make millions of dollars out of the Cuban people.

The Cuban Revolution put an end to this, but it didn't stop successive United States governments trying to reverse the gains of the Cuban people through overt attacks like the Bay of Pigs invasion and covert actions in conjunction with Batista's supporters. Today the US government grants millions of dollars to groups working in and outside Cuba on so called "democracy building programmes" with the objective of forcing a change of Government in Cuba to one more subservient to US political and economic interests.

Cuba's Democracy

Cuba's democratic system grew out of a desire to defend the gains of the 1959 Revolution such as the eradication of illiteracy, and the introduction of universal free health care and social provision designed to meet the needs of the people. The system is designed to involve the mass of the Cuban population in every level of the democratic process to ensure that money, violence and corruption could never again be used to take power.

The grassroots participatory nature of the Cuban system means that in addition to elections, there are further opportunities for the population to participate in decision making. People can exercise their democratic rights through voting for representatives to the Municipal, Provincial and National Assemblies and through their membership of '**mass organisations**' which represent women, students, trade unionists and

other parts of civil society and have the right to be consulted on legislation.

Mass Organisations

Cuba's mass social and grassroots organisations have millions of members. They are self-regulating voluntary bodies with their own staff, buildings and resources.

These include the Cuban Workers Central (CTC); the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC); the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP); the University Students Federation (FEU); Pre-university secondary pupils (FEEM); and the neighbourhood based Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs). All have the right to nominate delegates to Provincial and National parliaments and to initiate and be consulted on legislation in the National Assembly.

More than 2,221 voluntary organisations covering a wide span of interests - social and grassroots bodies, technical, scientific, cultural, artistic, sports, friendship and solidarity organisations exist in Cuba. They range from the mass organisations composed of millions through to much smaller bodies with more specific interests.



A voter registers to vote in a local polling station in Cuba. Elections to local councils are once every 2.5 years, and for provincial and national bodies once every 5 years.

Find out more at www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk

Elections in Cuba

- You can vote in elections at 16
- You can stand for local election at 16 and national elections at 18
- All elections are by secret ballot and voting is voluntary
- Elected representatives continue to be paid their working wage
- Elected representatives can be recalled
- Provincial/national parliament election are every 5 yrs and local every 2.5 yrs
- Women make up 48.9% of the members of the National Assembly
- Candidates must achieve 50% plus 1 vote to be elected

Local, regional and national elections

Cuba has 169 Municipal Assemblies, 16 Provisional Assemblies and a National Assembly to which representatives are elected by secret ballot. Voting is voluntary and votes are counted in public. Local and regional representatives are called delegates, and representatives at the national parliament are called Deputies. They are subject to recall by their constituents at any time, and receive no financial incentives other than their normal working wage.



List of candidates are displayed in the local community

During elections it is illegal to spend any money promoting candidates. Candidates' biographies and their reasons for standing are simply displayed on local notice boards so that every candidate receives the same exposure. Political parties are permitted in Cuba, however they are not allowed to nominate or campaign for candidates. This includes the Cuban Communist Party which is forbidden by law from interfering in the electoral process.

Municipal Assembly

The electoral process in Cuba begins with municipal elections once every 2.5 years. Each Municipal area is divided into 'wards' which nominate and elect their delegates. They do this by dividing each ward into smaller nomination areas – between two and eight per ward depending on the population density. Candidates are nominated by their neighbours in local open community meetings, where they are free to accept or decline the nomination. If several people are nominated, the candidate is chosen by a show of hands. In this way, each ward in the municipality ends up with at least two candidates on the ballot paper.

Successful candidates must gain more than 50 per cent of the votes cast in a secret ballot. If nobody achieves this, then run off elections are held until the required majority is achieved. For example in October 2002 the electorate could choose from 32,585 candidates standing for 14,949 municipal delegate places. Some 1,370 delegate positions went to a second round of voting and 3 to a third. More than 81.7 per cent of those eligible voted in the elections which are completely voluntary.

Delegates are required to meet with their electors at least once every six months for 'accountability sessions' where they must take up issues and problems raised by their constituents and seek solutions. They can be recalled at any time if their constituents feel that they are failing to perform their role adequately.

Provincial Assembly

The delegates to the Provincial Assembly are elected once every five years. Half of the delegates are nominated from those already elected to the Municipal Assemblies, the other half are nominated by Cuba's

mass organisations representing women, trade unions, students, small farmholders, and the neighbourhood associations (see section on Mass Organisations).

The elections to the Provincial Assemblies are not competitive. Instead Electoral Commissions, chaired by a member of the Cuban Workers Central (CTC) and made up of representatives from the mass organisations, draw up a list of candidates. These candidates have been nominated at hundreds of meetings of the mass organisations over a period of many months. After wide consultation and after agreement from the Municipal Assembly, a list of candidates is recommended for the Provincial Assembly. The list is then put to the electors for approval in a secret ballot. As in the municipalities candidates must win more than 50 per cent to become members of one of the 16 provincial assemblies.

National Assembly

Cuba's parliament, the National Assembly of People's Power, is made up in a similar way to the Provincial Assemblies. Elections take place once every five years and half the delegates come from the municipalities and the other half are candidates nominated by the mass organisations. A list of candidates for National Assembly Deputies is put before the electorate and each must receive 50 per cent or more of the vote or alternative candidates can be nominated.



Above: A local community meets to nominate its ward candidates for the Municipal Assembly elections. Nominations to decide the candidates are decided by a show of hands, but the final for representatives to the Assemblies at all levels are decided by secret ballot Above right: Election billboard encouraging people to vote.



The Cuban Constitution

The rights of the Cuban people are written into the Cuban Constitution which was formally adopted, together with the political institutions and procedures of the Cuban government, in a 1976 vote approved by 98% of the electorate.

Article 1 states that:

“Cuba is an independent and sovereign socialist state of workers, organised with all and for the good of all as a united and democratic republic, for the enjoyment of political freedom, social justice and collective well-being and human solidarity”.

Article 9 of the Constitution guarantees that:

- every man or woman, who is able to work, have the opportunity to have a job;
- no disabled person be left without adequate means of subsistence;
- no sick person be left without medical care
- no child left without schooling, food and clothing;
- no young person left without the opportunity to study;
- no one be left without access to studies, culture and sports.

The state commits itself to working to achieve a situation in which no family is left without a comfortable place to live.

Of the 612 deputies, or MPs, elected to the National Assembly in 2013, 48.9 per cent were women, the average ages was 48 and eight per cent were 35 years or younger. Voter turnout was 90 per cent of the electorate

National Assembly delegates are responsible for electing the Council of State, which in turn elects ministers and the Cuban President and Vice President. Following a decision at the 2011 Communist Party Congress, senior elected officials can only serve two consecutive terms (10 years) in office. Current President Raul Castro will stand down at the 2018 elections after his second term ends.

Influencing power – the power of the people

In Cuba, participation in decision making is not confined to voting in elections and leaving everything up to elected delegates and deputies in between. The mass organisations, to which people belong on a voluntary basis, play a vital role.

For example, when the National Assembly proposed a new Labour Law in 2012, a year long consultation process involving some 69,056 trade union meetings and 2,802,459 workers took place to discuss it. As a result 101 significant amendments to the proposals were agreed including 28 totally new regulations.

Work Commissions

All Assemblies, National, Provincial and Municipal, have Work Commissions. Their role is to research and scrutinise policy areas and feed directly into policy content, and at the National level into drafting legislation. There are around 20,000 people involved in the Work Commissions at any one time including delegates and specialists pertinent to the commission's field of work in areas such as health, education and production.

Get involved

Help end the illegal US blockade of Cuba and defend the Cuban people's right to determine their own future free from foreign interference and aggression.

Please support the Cuba Solidarity Campaign
Membership includes quarterly magazine and free 15 track Cuban music CD. £20 waged/£8 unwaged



A polling station and ballot box are prepared in advance of the 2013 elections

Find out more:

Further reading:

Cuba and its Neighbours by Arnold August

Democracy & Revolution by DL Raby

Leadership in the Cuban Revolution by Antoni Kapcia

CSC Trade Union Fact Sheet

CubaSí magazine articles archive

Full details at www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk

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