



**Cuba Transition  
Project**

**THE GREATEST CHALLENGE:  
CIVIC VALUES IN  
POST-TRANSITION CUBA**

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# Cuba Transition Project – CTP

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## **Executive Summary**

The twofold purpose of this paper is to profile the values and political culture of the Cuban people and to offer a range of policy options that can strengthen pro-democratic attitudes, behavior, and social capital in a post-transition Cuba. The paper begins by posing two key questions: Do the values of the Cuban people support or subvert democracy? If Cuban political culture tends to undermine civic democratic life, can it be transformed to facilitate democratic consolidation? In practice, fostering civic values in a post-transition Cuba will be the greatest socio-political challenge that the Cuban people and international actors will confront.

Although Cuban political culture since the Republic (1902-1959) has exhibited a pro-democratic interest, a host of attitudes, affective tendencies, and political behaviors have corroded civic democratic life. The result has been panoply of political and social ills, the most dramatic of which is the institutionalization of intolerance under the aegis of the one-party political system since 1959. The primary normative foundation for Cuban incivility since the Republic has been the notion that the ends justify the means. This norm has operated at the level of collective projects for the nation as a whole as well as in daily social life. Since 1959, that logic has been enshrined in institutions and rules, both formal and informal.

The point of departure of the paper is that the transformation to pro-democratic values is an important sustenance of democracy, even if alone it is insufficient to guarantee democracy. Democratic civic values are the software of democracy, while institutions are its hardware. To transform a political culture in the direction of a democratic one, both values and institutions should change. The paper recommends working on both fronts but warns that such attempts are plagued with uncertainty, as the experience of other nations provides no guaranteed formula nor any clear road map.

The challenge that Cuban political culture has placed on democratic governance is not new. On the contrary, it has a long history. Even the

communist regime's attempts to transform the culture of Cubans have met with modest results at best. Cubans today are apathetic and lack confidence in political institutions. Criminality among youth has increased since the 1990s. The young have opted out of the system both symbolically and practically; exit is their hope. The economy offers few rewards for those who follow the law, so lawlessness is rampant. Cubans resort to the illegal informal sector to survive and are consequently socialized to break the law. The duplicitous morality many have adopted espouses one set of criteria in public and a different one in private. Stealing from the state is not perceived as stealing, and as a consequence, corruption, both petty and official, is on the rise. Cubans seem to want to be free from politics rather than agents of it, while holding at the same time high expectations of what the state should deliver.

Civil society is controlled by the state and can hardly be considered civil. Repression and intolerance continue as ways of dealing with political dissidents and opponents. Autonomous associations have little if any space to operate; those that survive are harassed and repressed. People have resorted to informal networks to satisfy both material and non-material needs, reinforcing a penchant for anti-institutionalism and the Cuban type of social capital.

Any post-transition government will have to deal with this socio-cultural fabric. This does not mean that Cubans do not yearn for democratic participation, efficacy and efficiency. They do. But will their cultural proclivities — their political culture and their social capital — sustain or undermine the yearning for democracy and civic culture in the future? Will an uncivil society arise once again? What can the United States do to help strengthen social capital and deepen the pro-democratic reservoir of values? Is such a goal attainable? This paper presents a number of policy options ranging from general guidelines to specific initiatives on a number of fronts.

In general, the United States must recognize that the democratic legacy in Cuba stems from sources quite divergent from the US variant of liberalism. Cuba's political culture, a combination of modern liberalism, Iberian corporatism, and everyday informality, has supported an interventionist state that has guaranteed a minimal safety net for all. The United States must respect this tradition and Cuba's sovereignty while



encouraging the emergence of a democracy normatively in tune with new global standards. This will be a difficult balance to sustain. Despite policy alternatives recommended at both the macro and micro levels, changing values is a delicate process, as the historical record on socio-cultural engineering has been mixed. Moreover, the challenges of post-transition, including both an economic crisis that is likely to continue well into the future and the Cuban people's exhaustion with politically orchestrated campaigns, render the task almost quixotic.

## Introduction

“If there is something which has characterized in general our public life it is precisely the total absence of norms of public morals. This has been a show, more or less turbulent and brazen, of minor instincts and passions.”

*Jorge Mañach, Crisis de la Ilusión 1939*

I am not the first to take on what appears to be an impossible task, the promotion of civic culture in Cuba. Since the nineteenth century activists and analysts have pursued this elusive quest. Yet, I refuse to engage, as so many others have, in the extreme tradition of national self-flagellation. This paper, therefore, is balanced precariously between pessimism, pragmatism, and optimism as it poses several key questions and proposes answers to them.

Do the values of the Cuban people support or subvert democracy? If Cuban political culture tends to undermine democratic life, can it be transformed into a civic, pro-democratic one? These are perhaps the most difficult questions one can pose while looking toward the future of Cuba. Promoting a civic democratic culture will be the greatest challenge that the Cuban people, the Cuban state, the United States, and international society will confront in a post-transition Cuba. Neither the historical record of fostering change in values nor the experience of democratic culture in Cuba is promising. Observers of the Cuban political scene since Father Felix Varela in the nineteenth century have expressed their concern for the corrosive effect that Cuban values have on good government. Varela admonished his compatriots for caring exclusively for personal profit, much to the detriment of collective goods (Varela). The tradition that Varela initiated, pitting moralism against incivility, ran through the Republic and well into the Revolution. Since Varela, observers have remarked on the opportunism, social indiscipline, propensity for violence, and lack of civic responsibility of Cubans (Varona 1914, 3). Even Cuban President Fidel Castro, whose regime has attempted to transform

the culture of Cubans in an effort to create a generation of new men and women whose spirit would contribute to forging the communist utopia, continuously complains about the negative cultural traits that subvert his effort of cultural re-engineering (Castro 1987).

Throughout decades of socialist rule, the Cuban people have challenged the government's socialization campaigns. Today, sectors of the youth are dissocialized, apathetic, and disconnected from official political institutions. The increase of criminality among them is alarming. Consumerism has become one of the most cherished values among the young (Dominguez and Ferrer 1996, 50). Cubans of all ages seek refuge in *la doble moral* (one standard of conduct for the public sphere, another for the private). Most resort to illegal means to *resolver* (to make ends meet). As a result, petty corruption is endemic; official corruption is on the rise. Workers are unmotivated and unproductive. Intolerance has been institutionalized and legalized, and non-conformists are harassed, repressed, imprisoned, or exiled. Citizens are disengaged from formal politics as opportunities for efficacious political participation have been foreclosed. Fear has corroded social trust; autonomous collective action is practically impossible (Fernandez 2000).

Despite the regime's rhetoric of equality, neither racism nor machismo has disappeared. Blacks continue to fill the ranks of the lower sectors of society. The state has relied on militarization, violence, and aggression — behavioral patterns usually associated with masculinity — to deal with social problems. However, Cubans yearn for a more democratic system and a more open economy.

The quest for democracy in Cuba is not new. On the contrary, its roots are as old as the attempt to generate effective, legitimate, and representative institutions upon the advent of the Republic in 1902. The aspiration ran through Varela to José Martí, one of the founding fathers of the nation, and continued through scores of intellectuals of the early Republic. The fight against corruption, for instance, motivated tens of thousands of Cubans in the 1950s and inspired supporters of the Revolution in its early years. Alongside the traits that erode civility and democracy still exists a pro-democratic reservoir that is manifest in native dissident organizations that speak the language of democracy and in other Cubans who advocate a more “civil” society.

The dream of a democratic civic spirit has proved to be a chimera,

though. As in the Republic, since 1959 Cubans have expressed attitudes and values that both facilitate and repel democratic ideals. The same can be said about Cuban exiles who vote, but at times behave uncivilly. Cuban incivility rests on one normative pillar: the ends justify the means. This logic has been expressed time after time at two different levels: in collective pursuits of moral absolutes for the nation as a whole and in the sphere of informal social life. The latter is perhaps the single most important norm that must be changed to nurture a democratic nation in the future, but how will Cuba achieve it?

Cuban culture and the values it carries appear resilient, although not immutable. In the case of its political system, authoritarian and uncivil norms have been institutionalized in formal structures and legislation since 1959. How are civic values to be fostered, promoted, and institutionalized to facilitate democracy and improve its quality in post-transition?

Different societies and different political systems rest on divergent sets of values. Successful democracies rest not only on effective and legitimate institutions and good leadership, but also on citizens who espouse a pro-democratic spirit. Without deciding which of the three dimensions of democracy is most important, one can conclude that values and political culture in general contribute to the making or the unmaking of social capital, civility, and democracy. What is clear, though, is that some values promote democracy more effectively than others. Likewise, institutions support or fail to support civic democratic culture.

The issue of engineering values in an attempt to advance a democratic culture is one of the most daunting social issues for scholars and policymakers. Not only is its historical record sketchy, changing institutions is easier than altering human behavior and aspirations. Moreover, studying the case of Cuba presents practical obstacles, not the least of which is the lack of survey data on the beliefs and opinions of Cubans.

The focus of the paper will be the sociopolitical values, norms, and behavior — the political culture — that will challenge democracy in a future Cuba. A primary assumption is that in Cuban culture a long tradition of democratic thought and ideals and periods of democratic practice co-exist, combined with less than pro-democratic patterns that corrode civic democratic practice. Values such as social solidarity, equity, and state responsibility for the economic needs of the less fortunate predate 1959, although socialism underscored them. In fact, the social democrat-

ic aspect of Cuban political culture attained its maximum expression in the Republic in the form of the constitution of 1940 that legislated a strong welfare state within the context of democracy. Unfortunately, the civic life of the Republic was tarnished by corruption, “gangsterism,” and, finally, a military coup.

This paper argues two major points before presenting a set of policy options to promote civic values in a post-transition Cuba. First, although the ideals of democracy are not an alien to Cubans, judging from the sources that have shaped Cuba’s political culture, Cuban society has not advocated the Anglo-American liberal variant of democracy. Second, in addition to the challenges of its political culture, the norms and the networks of social capital in Cuba also go against ideal notions of democracy, liberal economics, and civil society.

Dimensions of Cuban political culture and the ways they mold social capital should change to facilitate social democracy and to prevent the return to an uncivil society. Because this position presumes the highly debatable notion that values and culture can be made to change given the right policy prescriptions, the argument highlights the importance of transforming institutions. Acknowledging the particularity of Cuban political culture, the difficulty in changing it, and the possibility of the rise of an uncivil society post-communism should serve to adjust expectations and forewarn possible developments. Although the paper does not address economic values directly, the discussion of political culture and social capital is meaningful in so far as the social and political aspects of culture serve to illuminate the economic sphere of social life. The general policy prescriptions presented in the last section of the paper endorse changing institutions as a way to partially transform values and behavior. They are applicable to economic institutional and normative transformation as well.

How can we address the issue of the promotion of civic values in a way that responds to Cuban cultural traditions while at the same time inserting Cuba in a global normative framework that helps sustain good governance? If the goal is to achieve a pro-democratic civic culture, policies must address material and immaterial aspects, normative as well as institutional dimensions, the formal as well as the informal.

The question regarding which values promote democracy has a counterpart: Which institutions promote democratic values? To do so, formal

institutions should be based on the rule of law. They ought to respect the separation of powers. They should guarantee property rights, the right to organize competitive political parties and free and fair elections, and the right to create civil associations. Formal institutions should, finally, promote a market economy — ideally one coupled with a safety net to safeguard the poorer sectors of society. Such institutions would promote democratic norms and values throughout the population. Though they might not be sufficient per se, without them no democratic values can take hold. Citizen participation is vital and civic values are desirable. In sum, to foster pro-democratic civic values, institutions are as vital as cultural norms. Only promoting both can prevent the possibility of the resurgence of an “uncivil” society, one based on intolerance for contending political positions, law-breaking, disregard for the public good and corrosive of civility in general.

## **Values and Democracy**

Values expressed in political culture define our personal and collective interests. Societies national and otherwise share values that define what is desirable. They bind people together and provide the basis for social identity. Analyzing the values of a society provides a lens through which to interpret its worldview, its behavior and ideals, its sense of good and evil, and its evaluations of the material and immaterial. Some basic values relate to material needs that guarantee the continuation of life. Others conform the rights, duties and moral principles of the collectivity; they forge the basis for “the good life.” In practice, values constitute the basis for public policies and politics (Carrow et al., 1998).

Values shift as a result of:

- 1) long term processes of structural change, such as an economic shift — from feudalism to capitalism;
- 2) generational foundational experiences such as the Civil Rights Movement;
- 3) institutional restructuring;
- 4) education, especially at the primary level; and
- 5) change in family socialization during the early stage of personality formation (Inglehart 1977).

The efficacy of governments and educational programs after the pri-

mary school years in changing core values is a declining line. The basic recipe for value change tends to be education, but, as a leading scholar of values has remarked, “Formal indoctrination seems relatively ineffective when learned beyond primary schools” (Inglehart 1977, 76). The Castro government’s politicization of schooling and socialization of youth evidence this trend, as the desocialization of young Cubans demonstrates their lackluster results.

Though major value shifts tend to take decades, if not centuries, norms can and do change. Post-war Germany and post-war Japan are dramatic cases in point. But values can shift in either direction, toward or away from democratic norms. The decline of social capital throughout the Western world, if not the globe, reflects a downturn in civic participation and trust in government institutions.

Democratic transitions are the result of several interrelated factors in tandem, from the decisions of leaders to institutional engineering, not to mention the impact of economics. Several countries that, like Cuba, exhibit a cultural propensity to both attract and repel democracy have been relatively successful in instituting systems of multiple parties in free and fair elections, a vibrant civil society, respect for human rights, and an open economy. Cuba does not have to be an exception. On the contrary, Cuba can follow the wave of democratization throughout the world despite the resources and constraints it must confront in the process.

Political culture is just one dimension that helps shape political outcomes. In addition, any discussion about the future must be by definition tentative and probabilistic. As Giuseppe Di Palma’s claimed about the indeterminacy of politics:

“In political matters, particularly in matters of regime change, causal relations are only probable and outcomes uncertain. We can make broad probabilistic predictions about categories, but we cannot make firm predictions about individual cases. In any single case, unless relevant circumstances accumulate in the extreme, the end result is not inescapable... Whatever the historical trends, whatever the hard facts, the importance of human action in a difficult transition should not be underestimated (Di Palma, 1990: 4).”

Scholars have posited a positive relationship between civic values and democracy (See Verba et al). This paper defines democracy as a system of government that at a minimum meets the following criteria:

- 1) it holds regular competitive elections among competing parties;
- 2) it guarantees civil liberties, including those of political, ethnic,

and social minorities;

- 3) it observes and is based on the rule of law; and
- 4) it has a public space known as civil society in which individuals, groups, and associations exercise their rights.

This public sphere has two main dimensions: quantitative/institutional and qualitative. The quantitative/institutional dimension refers to the number, type, and size of organizations that constitute civil society and the legal framework that permits social autonomy. The qualitative dimension depends primarily on the institutions and the political culture of society in general and civil society in particular. Important are its orientation; its character; and the identity of the actors and their goals, values, and procedures. The values, attitudes, feelings, and behavior characteristic of the participants are part of the qualitative aspects of democracy and civil society, but they have not received the attention they deserve.

In tandem with its institutional foundation, the qualitative basis of civil society imbues it with unique features in particular contexts. Trust, for instance, contributes to the civility of civil society and to its social capital. Not all societies operate in the same context of trust, nor do they have the same qualitative dimensions of social capital that can foster tolerance, cooperation, and citizen participation in the political and social system (Fukuyama 1995). Pro-democratic civic culture recognizes the institutional and legal basis of democracy as well as the rights and duties of citizens' vis-à-vis the state and each other in a context of the rule of law.

While no particular future is guaranteed, the cultural tendency of Cubans to construe politics as a moral crusade for absolute ends — what I call the politics of passion — and to behave in everyday life in ways in which the ends justify the means, even if breaking the rule of law is required to satisfy personal needs and wants — the politics of affection — will tend to reappear, perhaps with a vengeance during and after the transition, contributing to the formation of an uncivil society.

## **The Challenge of Constructing Civic Values in Transition and Post-Transition**

The challenges confronting the construction of civic values are immense. In the Cuban case, it is not the triumph of formal communist socialization but its failure that will prove to be most difficult to address.



The exploitation of national symbols and myths, such as the founding father of the Cuban nation, José Martí, might have discredited them in the minds of the younger generations. Rescuing them as a rallying point for good government and virtuous society is, therefore, a dubious proposition. The exhaustion with politics and political propaganda, *el teque*, will make getting the attention of the population even harder. To complicate matters, value priorities tend to be placed on needs that are in short supply (Inglehart 1977), which in the context of economic scarcity translates into materialist values of economic security being overvalued as compared to post-material ones. To compound the problems, key economic sectors will be the stronghold of communist elites and out of reach for the state as well as for the average citizen.

In Cuba, the experience of totalitarian government both exacerbates and facilitates the challenge of promoting a civic culture. It is compounded in so far as some negative patterns have been accentuated. For instance, the notion that the ends justify the means, the dependence on the state, everyday illegality, corruption, and the rejection of politics due to over-socialization have been exacerbated during the past decades and have led to reluctance to political participation. Precisely the lessons of the past, though, may steer Cubans away from what is not acceptable. But, who will decide what are those lessons and who will teach them?

The tradition of democracy in its civil and social dimensions must be rescued and restored post-transition to counter the tendency toward incivility, illegality, corruption, and authoritarianism. The everything goes mentality widespread in sectors of the population must be balanced with concern for the common good. The vulgarization common in daily life, especially among the youth in the streets, must be addressed, if not it will continue to fray social civility. During transition and in its aftermath a host of issues will be confronted, from institutional rebuilding to dealing with a past of abuses, from the propensity to break the code of conduct on a daily basis to the emergence of mafia-type organizations.

## **A Brief Look at the Experience of Former Communist and Non-Communist Countries**

In the case of the former communist states of Eastern Europe, the record of value change is mixed, although it is too early to tell the full

story. Scant existing research makes conclusions tentative also. Several promising research projects on social capital, including one sponsored by the World Bank and the government of Denmark, are ongoing. What is clear, though, is that the landscape is not as bright as many had expected after the demise of communism. In Russia, for example, instead of a civic culture that would underpin democracy, uncivil attitudes have flourished: political apathy and alienation from political parties, from the state, and from society. Illegality and criminality have increased, pessimism has overtaken the initial optimism, and a conservative attitude has replaced the reformist tendencies of the transition. A political analyst concluded that “even more important is the decline of public ideology” resulting in what he called the disappearance of public values (Shlapentokh, 1998: 40-41).

In Hungary, where socialism was much softer than in the former Soviet Union, the public is distrustful of politics, and the youth seem uninterested in political participation — partly due to their sense of low efficacy. The Hungarian government attempted to correct the situation by initiating a national curriculum that included social studies and civics as tools to transmit pro-social values. Hungarians reacted with suspicion to the direct injection of ideology into education once again, evidence that in the arena of value change, even the best motivations and the most carefully thought out programs face serious obstacles in implementation and outcomes (Matrari, 1998).

The effort to promote civic values in Cuba will probably come at an inauspicious juncture given the trends in Western and non-Western societies of decline in social capital and confidence in democratic government. Western democracies have become preoccupied with low voter turn-out rates, the decreasing number of individuals participating in civil associations, and a greater number of people, as Robert Putnam puts it, “bowling alone” (1993). In Latin America, distrust of government and skepticism regarding democracy is widespread. The only rays of hope are committed groups of citizens engaged in vibrant civil societies that are redefining the traditional rules of participation, albeit not always in terms of liberal democracy.

## **An Overview of Cuban Political Culture and Values: Modern, Corporatist, and Informal**

Cuban values and Cuban political culture are a combination of liberal/modern, corporatist, and informal codes. Together, the three major cultural paradigms have concurrently promoted and subverted democratic practice. Furthermore, the chasm between the ideal aspiration for democracy and the real corruption of that project in the past has facilitated the construction of politics as a moral crusade for absolute ends — the politics of passion. While aspiring for a collective good, Cubans have acted on a daily basis in ways that have undermined that goal by pursuing *amiguismo* or *sociolismo* ( i.e., the politics of affection), which breaks the law for instrumental and self-serving reasons. The politics of affection and passion have defined the character of politics in Cuba. The politics of passion stem from one main source: moral judgments regarding the gap between what is and what ought to be in the political and social realms. The politics of affection are both product and producer of the pervasive informality in the social sphere, and they reflect the weakness of formal institutions in addressing the needs of the Cuban people.

The paradoxical coexistence and confluence of the liberal, the corporate, and the informal have produced over time a particular manner of relating to the social and the political that, although typically Cuban, shares similarities with other areas of Latin America and the world. Modern liberal aspirations and inspirations have a long history in Cuba, dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Liberal ideology reached Cuba's shores from Europe and the United States, shaping the ways in which elites spoke and thought about the future of their country.

Modern aspirations came to naught due to their inherent idealism in conjunction with a host of economic, national, and international factors. Liberal values clashed with and were subverted by a corporatist cultural legacy. Based on the political philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas, among other Catholic thinkers, and with roots in Aristotle, corporatism was essentially monistic and patrimonial. The corporatist paradigm, a remnant of Spanish colonialism, endorsed the notion of law, order, stability, and elite leadership through a centralized bureaucratic authority, the state, that would govern and coordinate with hierarchically and organically integrated sectoral groups. Each group had rights and responsibilities dictated from above. The state, along with the private sector, would

play a defining role in the economy and would supply a modicum of goods to all. The economic paternalism of the corporatist state, with its implied concept of familial responsibility, has influenced Cubans' expectations of the state.

From this perspective, the state is a source of moral and economic benefits. The ultimate purpose of corporatism was to safeguard social harmony in an effort to sustain a healthy body politic able to provide the "good" (moral, ordered, and prosperous) life as defined by theologians and moral philosophers. The state, therefore, was not only a moral construct but carried an explicit moral imperative as well. Idealism, reflected in universal ethical principles designed to create an earthly *sumun bonum*, not the *plurum bonum* of the Protestant tradition, permeated the corporatist worldview. Corporatist utopianism provided a cultural foundation for politics as a crusade for moral absolutes, which the 1959 revolution pursued.

The adoption of Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology of Cuba in 1961, two years after the triumph of the revolution, did not represent as big a cultural watershed as initially expected or hoped for by the leadership. Marxism in practice is not totally dissimilar from corporatism. Both procure mobilization through mass organizations, both value social harmony over individual self-interest, and both promise utopia. In Cuba Marxism-Leninism was able to rest on long-standing aspirations for modernization, social equity, order, and sovereignty vis-à-vis the United States and on the romanticism of Cuban political culture since the colonial era, later fostered by José Martí, the founding father of the nation. Marxism offered a material and moral utopia for the community at large. Although specific dimensions of political practice changed after 1959, the cultural bases of Cuban social politics sustained its traditional foundation, which rested on liberal, corporatist, and informal (i.e., anti-institutional) norms.

Corporatist's emphasis on hierarchy, collective harmony, and regulation in society contradicts modern democratic notions of self-interest and the conflicting nature of social relations and neglects the informal conduct of individuals in daily life. *Lo informal* is closer to a pattern of behavior, with its own logic, norms, vocabulary, economic rationality, and emotional infrastructure, than to an explicitly articulated intellectual framework. Informality undermines the tenets of the first two paradigms by challenging institutional rationalization and regulation of life. Despite its sociopolitical importance, *lo informal* has been largely ignored

because it is less visible and apparently amorphous and thus difficult to study. But *lo informal* has its own forms and norms; it can be considered an informal institution.

Cuba reproduced *lo informal* over time as a way of dealing with, if not circumventing, the demands of the colonial regime to satisfy the material and nonmaterial needs of the self, the family, and the community. From the perspective of *lo informal*, the private is the basis for the public. It values the personal touch, the role of person-to-person contact, and the bond of affection among family members and friends above the impersonal norms of the state. People have hearts; institutions do not. Those you know and love help to fulfill material interests, while the impersonal forces of the state are unreliable at best and an obstacle at worst.

Informality depends on the possibility of bending the rules and bypassing legal norms because we are special and real. Its capacity to rationalize each and every action on the basis that what is most important is to satisfy one's own needs and those of one's loved ones seems infinite. Precisely because of its immense capacity to justify what could be considered self-serving, the normative foundation of informal behavior usually suffers from civic myopia; it fails to see what is beyond the networks of affection and disregards in the process the significance of institutions for the common good. Although *ser informal* (to be informal) is not usually a positive trait in Cuban society, there is a benign appreciation or tolerance of it. Informality, in contrast, is commonly contrasted with the staid and the formal, the pedantic.

*Lo informal* is not unrelated to the *choteo* (mockery), a peculiar Cuban brand of humor that is part of the informal paradigm. Its comic peculiarity is that it targets authority, with the purpose of undermining hierarchy, order, and regularization, central values of corporatism and liberal modernity. The *choteo* de-authorizes authority by debunking it and constitutes a form of rebellion. It is undisciplined and unserious, even if the business at hand is of the utmost importance. It reflects contempt for and cynicism about higher-ups and the institutions of society.

Informality at the grassroots has a paradoxical impact on governance. While it establishes trust and collaboration among small groups of individuals and allows for the manifestation of divergent passions, interests, and identities, it undermines larger associations whose membership is not limited to personal contact. Some of the affective aspects and the net-

works of the informal are important to the foundation of a civil society. The seeds of civic virtue and civic associations are to be found in a similar emotional infrastructure of solidarity and trust. The challenge is how to translate the norms of *lo informal* into ones that help to bind individuals into larger organizations and into community.

Informal practices are functional for those engaged in them as well as for the government. On a personal level, they provide satisfaction of needs, material and otherwise, and on a state level, they reduce bottlenecks and less overt opposition. At the same time, participation in *lo informal* socializes individuals in a culture of illegality. It accustoms them to break the law and thus undermines the tenets of the regime and foments incivility.

Cuban politics have been characterized by both a crusade for moral ends for the nation and a campaign for personal aggrandizement, profit, and prestige. Politics have represented a crusade to save the nation. While society at large has aspired to a higher level of moral political order, in their daily practice, social actors have undermined their lofty collective aspirations through their resort to informality and anti-institutionalism. The result is a loss of faith in the big projects of the modern state and results in national flagellation and anomie.

The irony is that the Cuban people, although disenchanting, have not totally abandoned their aspirations for a new and improved polity, yet they continue to act in everyday life in ways detrimental to the normative models they so cherish. In the long run, therefore, Cuban political culture will tend to have a contradictory impact on political transition and democratization. The politics of passion and affection, the tendency towards corporatism, and the desire for political modernity will exert their multiple influences on governance and social life in ways that are not narrowly liberal, if and when democracy is established in Cuba.

### **Social Capital in Cuba: Will It Help Sustain or Corrode Civility and Democracy?**

Scholars have recently argued that social capital — the norms and networks of society — can contribute to civic mindedness, which in turn has positive repercussions on economic productivity and governmental performance. Not all societies seem to be endowed with the same social

capital. As a source of social capital, Cuban informality and its networks based on exclusionary and particularistic criteria, such as affection, kinship and friendship, will pose challenges for civility and democracy. Though the networks of *lo informal* will help construct civil society and economic enterprises as friends and family form organizations and firms in a more open political and economic system, the Cuban variant of social capital has tended to bypass the rule of law and subvert the state in the past. While the social capital of *lo informal* has generated trust and collaboration, it has done so in relatively small groups. This helps explain the prevalence of small firms in both the Cuban economy pre-59 and in the Cuban-American economy. These tendencies are likely to continue post-communism and are likely to result in mafia-type of organizations. The networks of *lo informal* will favor personal connections and will tend to justify any and all actions in so far as they satisfy personal desires. Combined with the morally charged issues, challenges, and uncertainties that transition is likely to carry, the logic of the ends justify the means that is typical of Cuban culture probably will be reproduced, as a consequence setting the foundation for an uncivil society.

### **Specific Socio-Political Values, Attitudes, and Behavior of Cuban Society**

At a different scale of analysis, the features of Cuban political values, attitudes and behavior, particularly under communism, include:

- Social responsibility of the state, which favors a welfare policy for the less fortunate to guarantee a minimum standard of well-being as well as equity. Reliance on the state has been changing since the early 1990s — with the advent of the economic crisis, Cubans have been resorting more to self help initiatives and grassroots responses to the problems they face, as the state and local governments no longer respond to the problems of the population;
- Nationalism in two versions, reformist and radical, which coexists with a rejection of patriotic symbols, especially among the youth;
- A proclivity toward anti-institutionalism and personalism;
- A tendency toward spontaneity and informality instead of

formality and order;

- The penchant toward *choteo*;
- Desocialization coexisting with official socialization, which contributes to pervasive illegality, breaking the official norms of conduct;
- Anti-work attitudes due to the lack of material incentives for work;
- Pessimism toward the future — a sort of learned hopelessness — and a level of nihilism;
- Lack of basic social trust due to the fear generated by coercive government threats and mechanisms;
- Breakdown of family structure, which in turn has led to a number of social problems; and,
- Exit (physical or symbolic) from the island as the only option.

## **The Impact of Cuban Values on Governability, Democracy, and Social Life**

The combination of these attitudes, values, and behavioral patterns will challenge any type of government post-transition. They will impact the quality of democracy that Cuba develops as well as the political and civil society that will emerge post-transition, tending to imprint the general social fabric with incivility. Taken within the context of insecurity, uncertainty, and material deprivation that is likely during transition, governance will be difficult. The economy of scarcity typical of Cuban socialism, likely to continue during and immediately following transition, does not provide the most fertile ground for civic values to prosper. A number of these negative attitudes can be changed by altering the economic system, by providing incentives for work and by providing opportunities for efficacious political engagement in which political or civil participation is authentic and in which real or metaphorical exit from the political community is not the only option.

The Cuban people do have some values and resources that are amenable to the creation of an energetic civil society, an important component of democratic life. In conjunction with a relatively high level of education and other indexes of modernity, such as urbanization and access to media, Cuban society has a partial foundation for a democratic transition and consolidation.



## **Policy Options/Recommendations**

### *General Considerations:*

- Social engineering is a monumental proposition at best, whose record in terms of US policy initiatives and outcomes is mixed even in the most optimistic of assessments;
- US influence will not necessarily translate into the desired outcomes; a not small measure of humility is necessary;
- Not only is social engineering in the area of values questionable in terms of its practicality, it also carries considerable risks, not least of which is sparking and fueling anti-US sentiments; and,
- A difficult balance must be maintained between respecting national traditions, values, and behaviors and promoting civic values supportive of democracy.

Cuban democracy will not be necessarily akin to the United States' liberal version. Care must be taken not to repeat the mistakes of the past, specifically the facile idea that the state and the international community, including the United States, can dictate a set of pro-social attitudes and values that can be easily transmitted through the schools or the media. This sort of "benign" indoctrination will tend to be rejected as it was in the past and is at present in countries of Eastern Europe.

The specific policy guidelines offered below have two main targets: the hardware of politics (institutions) and the software (attitudes, norms, values and behavior). The relationship between institutions and values is interactive and mutually reinforcing. Changing institutions should lead to changed values, but the process is neither linear nor automatic. The promotion of the typical institutions of a democracy — separation of powers, competitive political parties, free and fair elections, the recognition of civil rights, and at least a minimum of socioeconomic rights — can contribute to the transformation of social norms into pro-civic ones. Legitimate, effective, and representative institutions are vital.

The democracy that might be created will be more likely than not a social democratic one, which will value a level of social equity. This tradition is related to corporatism and communalism, tendencies that socialism has underscored but which were present as the dominant political worldview since the early days of the Republic. This is especially important to recognize due to the anti-neoliberal campaign throughout the

world and the disenchantment with liberalism in some countries in Eastern Europe. Changing the political and economic structures and offering political and material incentives for citizens will address some of the traits that led to apathy, unproductive behavior and anti-social attitudes. On their own, however, structural reforms are insufficient guarantee for civility. U.S. policy should work with the international community (governments, multilateral agencies, and NGOs) in this endeavor wherever possible.

### *Specific Policy Recommendations*

*Emergency Aid to the successor/transition government.* This would enable the satisfaction of material values and would provide the material incentives to demonstrate that the government can deliver. The goal is to show that democracy pays off. However, one must be careful not to underscore the propensity toward welfare without work.

*The Reconstruction of Historical Memory.* A campaign toward this end is necessary. It would include contending and multiple perspectives of the republican and revolutionary past. In terms of policy options, this means funding for historical work (scholarship, oral histories, documentaries, etc) that would reach the populations and the schools (from elementary to university). This process would entail the critical archeology of Cuban political culture and political practice in an atmosphere of freedom of expression. Such an initiative would contribute to the new history textbooks for primary, secondary, and university students. It would also serve the goals of truth, justice and reconciliation.

*Education.* a) A Civic Education Program (CEP) at the university level, similar to the Civic Education Program headquartered at Yale University and that sponsors educational programs in the social sciences throughout Eastern Europe. The CEP hosts visiting scholars to European universities in the areas of social sciences. Similar to the CEP, education efforts in Cuba should fund and support research efforts in Cuban history and politics at leading academic centers inside and outside the island; and, b) A revised national curriculum for K -12 that includes a “soft” civic and social studies component. Two examples of recent civic curricular reforms are worth considering, the Hungarian and the British.

*Professional Exchanges.* Cuban political leaders, government offi-

cials and bureaucrats, civil society representatives, academics and business leaders should have exchanges with US, European, Latin American and other international counterparts. A host of such privately and publicly funded programs exist, and Cuba should be included in them as early as possible. Cuba should collaborate with and support civil and political society in terms of the trans-nationalization of these groups and the creation of linkages and epistemic communities. The emphasis should be on those agents that promise to promote change.

*Anti-Corruption Mechanisms.* Cuba would be well served to partake in such efforts at the official governmental level and the level of civil society, which represent the arena of greatest promise in the region. The focus is not only self-regulation of government, but also a vibrant civil society and state-society partnerships that serve as watchdogs against corrupt practices throughout all levels of governance, from the local to the national. The changes in this front represent a normative change in Latin America, one that clearly points to the growing distaste for corruption and its nefarious effects on the fabric of politics and society. Anti-corruption and moral politics have been cardinal points in Cuban politics both pre and post 1959. Civil society and political society campaigns in this direction would contribute to the legitimacy of the system.

*Strengthening Civil Society and Offering Assistance to NGOs.* In practical terms this means the nuts and bolts of creating and maintaining an independent organization, from budget control and sources of revenue, to ways of conducting a meeting, media relations, and lobbying techniques as well as provision of funding. The National Endowment for Democracy could be of assistance in this regard.

*Media.* A soft public relations campaign on TV and billboards could feature pop stars who transmit positive messages regarding civility, tolerance, respect for others and the environment, and social responsibility. A set of programming for children that promotes civic attitudes would be another part of this policy package. The Civic Forum might be given this task of coordinating the civic media efforts. The media is key in promoting civic attitudes as it provides information, encourages the discussion of important issues, and provides a platform for contending perspectives, while attenuating sensationalism and demagoguery.

Toward this end, the promotion of professional journalists and an independent media is necessary. A variety of programs designed to assist

in these twin efforts must be designed, including but not limited to training journalists — such a program exists at Florida International University, which offers an M.A. in Journalism in Spanish, and has a special program for Cuban journalists — alternative media, and civic education campaigns. Radio and T.V. Marti could play an invaluable role during and post-transition if the programs were in tune to the audience. Intelligent programming is a must. NGOs must also be afforded access to the media and should be assisted in developing media campaigns on important issues. The role of the Internet must not be ignored, either. Through the internet citizens and NGOs can not only get informed, but can express opinions and monitor government through access to budget expenditures writing letters to representatives among other activities.

*Efficient, Transparent, and Accessible Governance and Public Administration.* The reform of the public administration in terms of retraining of bureaucrats in a culture in which public service is a service accountable to the citizen-tax payer; public functionaries are not entitled to special privileges. Promote forums for debate and arenas for experts and NGO activists that could impact public policy. Provide technical assistance to government at all levels to increase government capacity and efficiency. Offer training to elected leaders through AID and NED and support the establishment of an Ethics Commission.

*A Civic Forum.* Post-transition efforts should include creating a diverse civic forum to address values and political culture in general as they discuss national and international issues. This sort of forum would serve as an arena for discussion but also as an example of civility and a teaching tool for the society at large, united by a common goal of creating a civic nation.

*Working with Municipalities.* Policies must support the reform of local governments and direct resources to those who deal with most problems of the Cuban population. The municipalities have been most responsive to citizen needs, making them a reservoir for good will.

*Community-Based Initiatives.* Policy instruments such as micro-loans should self-help initiatives at the grassroots should consult with local groups and local officials. The connection between citizens, local government, and NGOs will address local problems by working together. These sorts of initiatives are crucial to empowering citizens, developing social capital, and making democracy real.

*Conflict Resolution and Conflict Management Training.* Political and civil society leaders can benefit from training in mediation skills and processes. Some of these efforts, in an embryonic fashion, have started in Cuba in the Centro de Formación Cívica of the Catholic Church in Pinar del Rio and Centro Martin Luther King in Havana. Building on these efforts would have a multiplying effect.

*Human Rights and the Administration of Justice.* The promotion of human rights requires not only legal recognition in the Constitution but a political and social effort that includes: a) restructuring the judiciary and the legal profession; b) retraining the police forces; c) assisting and training human rights activists; and, d) educating society at large. The government and the opposition must recognize past human rights abuses, something that should be part of the campaign to reconstruct historical memory outlined above.

*Civil-Military Relations.* The academy, civil society, and political parties need support as they consider options for oversight of the military. Activities could include passing legislation, retraining the military, and funding NGOs and academic centers.

*Responsible Economic Citizenship Education.* Training, education, and media campaigns ought to stress the importance of economic responsibility as consumers in a market economy. Such training might include workshops and financial counseling on issues of loans, credit cards, investment, and saving.

*Support and Training for Elections.* Technology and educational infrastructure for political campaigns as well as for elections are also essential.

## Conclusion

Is Cuba's political culture a hospitable ground for democracy? Are the legacies of colonialism, corporatism, failed democracy, authoritarianism, and socialism conducive to a democratic transition, or do they subvert democratic governance? The past does not have to determine the future. Cuba's past does not preclude a democracy, although the political culture of passion, affection, and informality tends to conspire against it. The competing paradigms typical of Cuban politics in the past (modern/liberal, corporatist, and the informal) will continue to exert influence on Cuban politics. During and after the transition, the pursuit of high absolute moral ends through any necessary means — the politics of passion— will be combined with the politics of affection, in which personal exceptionalism will provide the logic to bypass the formalities of state structures, procedures, and norms to fulfill personal passions and interests. Emotions will play their characteristic dual role: helping to both construct and destroy political order. Combined with the clash of normative frameworks typical of Cuban political culture, they will put the nation-state, its modern tenets, and liberal democracy to the test once again. The long-term prospects for democracy are dimmed by an inhospitable political economy that will demand continued austerity into the foreseeable future.

Democratization in Cuba will not likely meet the academic standards of liberal democracy or the expectations of most. The democratization that will unfold will be *a la cubana*. If and when democracy is implemented in Cuba, it will encounter a strong tendency toward incivility in political and civil society. That incivility will emanate, among other sources, from the politics of passion and the politics of affection. Harry Eckstein argues that “balanced disparities” are required for democratic stability (Eckstein, 1992). One of those disparities is the presence of both affective attachment and affective neutrality toward the political system. If the issues confronted tend to be foundational and morally charged, politics lose that balance and civil society becomes uncivil as politics are pursued passionately. This is particularly the case when institutions are weak and a consensus on democratic values is missing.

The redefinition of the political community, revanchism, mixed feelings about the Cubans in Miami, jockeying for positions of authority and

economic privilege, unresolved issues regarding property settlement, the painful economy of the near future, and the racial divide compound to make transition problematic and emotionally charged. Class differences will become increasingly marked among a population that has been accustomed to a modicum of equality. The most problematic social sector is the youth, particularly the poorer *los desvinculados* (the unconnected). The riots that occurred in Old Havana in summer 1994 indicate the possibility of social explosion, which might linger well after a regime change. The vulgarization of *la calle* (the streets), the everything goes mentality, and the incivility which the phenomena entail will endure as well.

The tradition of rhetorical inflation and demagoguery may find fertile ground during the transition. Market reforms, especially if ushered in under a merciless capitalism, will not only augment the pain of ordinary Cubans but also foster incivility and disenchantment with the new order. The euphoria of private enterprise might also validate the notion that in this system of relentless individualism everything goes, including corruption and “gangsterism.” Network capital will become increasingly important as former officials resort to their relations in an attempt to secure their financial positions in a post-socialist regime, a common pattern in transitions from socialism elsewhere.

If Putnam is right that civic-mindedness is a good predictor of democratic success and economic development, then one would conclude that the future of democracy in Cuba is hardly bright (Putnam, 1993). World time offers one way to deal with this dilemma: free enterprise in a leaner state that provides a minimal safety net. But the Cuban people need and expect more. Their desire is based on a paradox: a smaller state that guarantees political and economic freedoms in addition to a modicum of material support, in the context of a bankrupt economy. These expectations seem doomed to remain unfulfilled.

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