

# INSIDE CIVIL SOCIETY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN CUBA OF OPINIONS AMONG MEMBERS OF INDEPENDENT GROUPS ON PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRATIZATION

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During 2000, the Center for the Study of a National Option (CEON), a research and analysis institute affiliated with the Cuban Democratic Revolutionary Directorate in Miami, carried out a survey among civil society and opposition groups inside Cuba. Pro-democracy leaders in different parts of the country gathered focus groups to answer an in-depth questionnaire prepared by the CEON with expert academic advice. Although the CEON does not pretend in any way to present the survey results as representative of ALL the Cuban opposition, it does affirm that the results of this survey constitute the first profound sampling of the views and opinions of Cuba's civic opposition. This study is path breaking even though the data collected, for practical reasons, is limited and not based on a random sample of groups in Cuba.

This survey, conducted among many men and women inside the island who are protagonists of the civic resistance to the Castro regime, provides a glimpse into the dissidents' perceptions and views about possible social and political changes in the island.

The activities of Cuba's civic opposition have increased dramatically in the last few years. The *Steps to Freedom* reports<sup>2</sup> indicate that civic actions went from 44 in 1997 to 444 in 2000. This growth in civic resistance becomes evident in some of the key re-

sponses to the questionnaire provided by the activists.

Obviously, they are no longer at the survival stage, concerned exclusively with establishing a precarious presence in Cuban society in order to denounce human rights abuses. The activists are now at an empowerment stage, perhaps on the border line of what Vaclav Havel once described as the symbolic and significant stages in nonviolent civic struggle.

Their responses provide a clear indication of what the activists need in order to further advance toward the goal of bringing about a true democratic transition in Cuban society. Greater material assistance to democratic activists in Cuba is vital. The following are some of the key findings of the report.

On the potential for change:

- Most activists support the strategy of increasing civic resistance to peacefully confront the government with demands for political change. Most independent groups are not waiting for the death of Castro to push for a transition.
- 100% of the groups believe that improved communication, both from the democratic world to the island and from the pro-democracy move-

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1. This study has been prepared with the advice of Professor Juan J. López. Professor López presented the paper at the ASCE meeting.

2. The *Steps to Freedom* reports are annual reports on activities of the pro-democracy movement in Cuba, published by the CEON and the Cuban Democratic Revolutionary Directorate. Reports are available for 1997–2000.

ment in Cuba to the people, is the key to increasing a sense of political efficacy in the population.

- 83% of the groups believe that there is sympathy in the population toward the groups and that the people perceive groups in the civic resistance as legitimate. Groups cite tangible examples of support from the population.
- 100% of the groups support the strategy of promoting civic resistance to bring about a democratic transition in Cuba.

On the obstacles to change:

- 100% of the groups believe that the process of legal migration decreases involvement among the population in opposition activities. Migration accords benefit the regime.
- 57% of the groups say that people fear potential social results of a transition, such as high unemployment, losing the social safety net, and property claims from exiles to their homes. They also point out that these fears are not important in accounting for the low degree of popular involvement in the civic resistance.
- 30% of the groups believe that greater unity of the opposition is needed to achieve a political transition.
- Groups need to develop a more complete and long-term vision of how a transition can be brought about.
- Groups need a better understanding of how transitions took place in Eastern Europe.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

The study has been motivated by the desire to provide independent groups in Cuba and support groups abroad with information and analyses that can increase the effectiveness of efforts to develop civil society and to advance toward a transition to democracy. Others, like policy makers in the United States government, may also find this report useful. This study provides information on what activists in Cuba think about various issues, what they want to do and what they can do to accelerate the development of civil society and foster political change. It

also documents what problems they face, what they need in order to implement their plans and how supports groups abroad can best help independent groups in the island. A stronger civil society is important not only to promote a transition, but also to increase the likelihood that the transition will be to democracy and not to some other type of dictatorship. When the transition occurs, groups of democratic activists should have the capacity to become part of the transitional government. Otherwise, it is possible that members of the current ruling elite may establish a new dictatorship, as happened in Romania after the fall of the Ceacescu government.

### THE QUESTIONNAIRE

A very comprehensive, open-ended questionnaire was constructed by CEON with expert advice and distributed among leaders of seven civil society groups in different parts of Cuba. Each leader conducted a focus group with members of his/her organization to collectively answer the questionnaire. Members from two additional groups that were not included in the original sample joined one of the focus groups. Hence, the data are from nine independent groups in Cuba. The groups operate in different regions of the country, all along the island. The seven completed questionnaires were then sent from Cuba to CEON for analyses and publication of this report. The data were collected during the year 2000. No previous study has specifically targeted individuals at the forefront of the struggle for the development of civil society and for democratization.

The questionnaire appears as an appendix. The design of the questionnaire was guided by previously available data on Cuba and a comparative and theoretical understanding of the growth of civil society and of transitions to democracy. It includes sets of questions on many of the most relevant issues facing independent groups. Some of the questions asked the activists for their perceptions about attitudes and beliefs among the general public in Cuba. Although we could not gather direct survey data from the population, perceptions of activists about what people think regarding civil society and issues related to political change are valuable as a proxy for public opinion because activists are sensitized to pay special attention

to the beliefs, attitudes and behavior of the population concerning civil society, their activities and matters related to a regime change.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Undoubtedly, the study presented here will be criticized on methodological grounds. Some will try to discredit the study by stating that it was done by an organization opposing the Castro dictatorship with financing from Cuban Americans, as if these facts in themselves precluded the production of a serious, professional study. The questionnaire was designed with careful scholarly advice. Its goal was to collect information on key topics and issues related to civil society and the prospects for a political transition. The questionnaire was not put together with the intention of supporting any particular agenda.

Although some findings in this research support positions advocated by the Cuban Democratic Revolutionary Directorate, the study also shows problems with these groups in Cuba. Some data from this study concurs with reports from independent journalists in Cuba and from surveys of recent arrivals to the United States. Similarity in findings from different sources suggests that data are accurate. An objection to conclusions from the study is that the findings may not be representative of all the civil society groups in Cuba. It is true that only nine groups in Cuba participated in the focus sessions to answer the questionnaire, and that these groups were not selected randomly. However, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to draw a random sample of civil society groups in Cuba and then get those selected to answer an extensive questionnaire.

Responses provided by the dissident organizations questioned must first be evaluated as the valuable testimony of besieged resistance forces, within a totalitarian regime, who are courageously searching for ways to bring about change through non-violent means. Given this reality, it is neither reasonable nor realistic to meet strict methodological standards. In practical terms, one has to make do with whatever information one can collect. The data gathered by the CEON study is significant and fills gaps in information about civil society and its political context in the island. Moreover, this CEON study is the best sys-

tematic information available on the opinions of democratic activists in Cuba. The standard so far has been to make claims about the opinions of activists in the island based on what one or a few activists say, usually in public statements. For example, the declaration that material assistance from U.S. government funds to civil society groups in Cuba would be detrimental to those groups is strongly refuted by what democratic activists report in this study. Some other assertions about civil society and their political environment in the island that are made in the United States are impressionistic, basically groundless. Yet these assertions are transmitted by the press and repeated by individuals in important positions as if the claims were in tune with reality.

Any data gathered from subjects living under Communist rule or emigrating from countries under such autocracies are open to doubts about validity and representativeness. But yet these data have been collected in countless studies and taken seriously by many. Audience studies by Radio Martí have been conducted among recent exiles, visitors to the United States Interests Section in Havana, and among the general population in Cuba. Similar studies were done for Radio Free Europe (RFE). People traveling to or emigrating to the West from Eastern European countries were interviewed about their listening to RFE and about life under Communism. This type of survey data was used extensively in Eastern European studies and proved to be accurate concerning what was going on under communist regimes in that region.

### **THE REALITIES OF THE CASTRO REGIME AS VIEWED BY THE DISSIDENTS**

A set of questions referred to the activists' perceptions concerning the degree of support that the Castro regime has in the general population and among members of the Communist Party. Although to many Cuba watchers it may seem obvious that the degree of support for the government is low, some people outside Cuba still claim that popular support and loyalty among Communist Party members are important in accounting for the endurance of the dictatorship. Every answer to the question about the extent of genuine support for the government indi-

cates that from the point of view of the activists a majority of the population disapproves of the regime.

Keeping in mind that according to activists there is little overall genuine support for the government, there is disagreement among respondents about how important nationalism is in generating the support that does exist. The most common answer is that nationalism has some importance. Only one group argued that nationalism is very important. Another group maintained that nationalism is inconsequential as a source of support. According to this group, although the government continuously appeals to nationalism, people believe that, rather than defending the sovereignty of the nation, what the government defends are the privileges of the ruling elite. In any case, what the activists report is that nationalism is not a major source of support for the government.

A few questions address membership in the Communist Party, discontent among regime cadres, and government corruption. Responses make two clear points about membership in the party. Eighty percent or more of the answers coincide in the perception that: (1) the Party is having greater difficulties recruiting members, and (2) most of those who join the Party do so for personal gain. The activists questioned tend to believe that there are few “true believers” in the government ranks. Party members tend to be “careerist,” something typical in Eastern Europe before the fall of communism. The activists believe that the main motive people have for joining the Communist Party are: to get better jobs, to obtain higher education, and to gain access to government property in order to steal it.

Eighty-three percent of the groups affirm that corruption among government officials is pervasive, from the lowest to the highest levels everywhere in the state. And all the groups in the study declare that they perceive discontent among regime cadres. Half of the groups assess the degree of discontent, claiming that there is discontent in the vast majority of the Communist Party cadres. Respondents cite as evidence of discontent defections abroad, retirement from public life, corruption, trying to live outside Cuba, and anonymous letters critical of Fidel Castro

and the regime circulating within high government circles.

The existence of widespread corruption among Communist Party cadres, as perceived by the surveyed activists, is a strong indicator that Marxist-Leninist ideology is in an advanced state of decay despite continuous official proclamations to the contrary. Again, one can draw a parallel here with Communist autocracies in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s. The disintegration of official ideology in Cuba would have implications for the classification of the Castro regime as well as for all explanations of facts or events in Cuba based on the assumption that ideology still serves as an important guideline for government policies and behavior. Based on the perception of these activists, it would be far-fetched to claim that commitment to ideology among regime cadres is an important reason for the endurance of the Castro government or that the government refuses to implement a greater degree of market-oriented reforms because of commitment to anti-capitalist tenets in Marxism-Leninism.

One of the questions in the CEON study asks whether civil society activists and citizens in the general population believe that people would be shot in the streets if popular protests take place. Activists in sixty percent of the groups do not think that those with guns will fire on the people if mass demonstrations occur. The other forty percent of the groups believe that people would get shot. Regarding the perception of activists about what the general population thinks concerning the likelihood of people getting shot in mass protests, the responses are evenly split. Half of the groups report that the people are afraid that those with guns would fire and the other half affirms the opposite. These responses suggest that fear of a massacre in the event of mass protests is not widespread in the population. The objective evidence is that, since the Castro regime came to face the economic problems and growing discontent that developed in the 1990s, whenever large, spontaneous protests have taken place, like the one in Havana in August of 1994, people have not been shot in the streets. This evidence and the responses to the CEON questionnaire suggest that fear of a massacre

among citizens is not a key in accounting for the absence of mass protests to demand democratization.

### **EXPLAINING THE LOW DEGREE OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES**

If the activists are right in their perception that there is so much dissatisfaction with the Castro government among the population, a central question then is why people do not join the civic resistance in greater numbers. This is not only a question that an individual unfamiliar with the nature of Communist regimes might ask. It is a fundamental question in accounting for the endurance of the dictatorship. There are a number of hypotheses; the most common is that people are afraid. But this reason, although it captures part of the truth, is incomplete and may not be the most important cause.

The CEON study posed a series of questions about why there are not more people participating in public opposition activities. From the perspective of the activists, there are three fundamental reasons for the low level of popular participation in public acts of opposition:

1. insufficient communication between civil society groups and the population,
2. fear of repression, and
3. a sense of political inefficacy among citizens, that is, people do not think that their participation in these activities will lead to political changes. As one group put it, “a lot of people believe that nothing is going to change [by their participation], only that they will get into trouble with the government.” Another group stated that if people believed that their participation would be effective, they would be willing to go to the streets to demand democratization.

The responses provided by the resistance members indicate that it is their perception that a lack of belief in political efficacy among the vast majority of the

population is somewhat more important than fear of repression in explaining the low level of popular participation in public acts of opposition.

Every group thinks that greater communication between civil society activists and the population is essential to increase the sense of efficacy in the population. A question asked how could a belief in political efficacy be developed in the population. All groups believe that communication is the key. The other factor that activists in three of the groups mention as necessary to foster a sense of efficacy in the population is for independent groups to be more effective in their work. These three groups argue that the work of civil society activists would be more effective if groups had greater resources and coordinated more their work among themselves. Respondents in the CEON study perceive that more material resources and “unity” among the groups are very important in the struggle to bring about a political transition. Activists and the people in general also need more knowledge about the nature and phases of nonviolent struggle. Traditionally, nonviolent civic struggles have developed through different stages that tend to lead toward mass demonstrations. But preparation for this final type of effort cannot be discounted. We will discuss these issues more extensively below.

Let us consider in more detail why respondents think that insufficient communication between civil society groups and the population hinders greater popular participation in acts of defiance. First, most activists believe that the dearth of a sense of political efficacy in the population is the primary reasons for the low degree of participation and that communication is the key to develop this sense among the people.<sup>3</sup> Second, activists maintain that independent groups are not well known in the population; hence people are uncertain about the aims of these groups and of their activities. People tend to distrust activists and their groups. Respondents also point out that civil society groups are unable to publicize enough their activities among the people.

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3. For an extensive coverage of the connections among political efficacy, communication and mass protests under communist regimes, see Juan J. López, *Democratizing Cuba: Lessons from Eastern Europe and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming in 2002.)

Activists believe that the image of civil society groups in the eyes of the population could improve if there were more communication between activists and the people. A set of questions addressed the issue of how activists are perceived in the population. Seventy-one percent of the groups in the study think that, with some exceptions, people do not perceive leaders of independent groups as offering a democratic alternative to the Castro regime. One of groups in the study argues that the reason for such perception in the population is that people have very little information about opposition leaders. Another question asks whether activists perceive that people expect civil society leaders to try to meet the social, economic and political aspirations of the citizens under a democratic regime. Again, seventy-one percent of the groups in the study report problems in the perceptions of opposition leaders by the people. The responses in this category are either that people do not know (because they do not have enough information) or think that only some leaders would try to fulfill the hopes of the citizens. That the perception of civil society leaders among the people could improve with better communication is suggested by the answers to other questions about what are the social, economic and political goals of activists and of the population.

It turns out that both the activists and the population, according to the respondents, have the same general goals. All the groups want transitions to democracy and to a market economy. And all answers indicate that the activists believe that the population wants the same. Forty-three percent of the groups also mention that the people want free education and health care. Another observation that can be made from the data is that there is little discussion among civil society groups about what should be the social, economic and political objectives under a democracy. This points to a gap in the preparation of democratic activists for the post-transition period. Civil society groups should be prepared to play an important political role after the fall of the dictatorship. The CEON has begun, in a limited way due to insufficient resources, to address this gap through its workshop program with groups in Cuba.

Despite the shortcomings in the perceptions of civil society groups in the population, eighty-three percent of the groups in the study think that there is sympathy in the population toward independent groups. Also, activists report that people perceive, at least some groups, as legitimate. Some of the evidence of sympathy cited is that people provide activists with resources (e.g., transportation and food), greet activists in public places, and provide activists with information about government abuses.

One question in the study addresses the issue of whether the image of civil society groups in Cuba would be harmed in the population if people knew that these groups receive aid from support groups in the United States. Some support groups in the United States have served as channels of resources from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy. Some individuals who are against the idea of the United States government providing material assistance to democratic activists in Cuba argue that such aid would damage the perception of independent groups among citizens in Cuba. It is assumed that people believe the claim of the Castro government that civil society groups are "agents of imperialism." All, except one, of the groups in the study say that the image of civil society leaders in Cuba would not be harmed if people knew that they receive material assistance from support groups in the United States. One group mentions that if the aid is used well and group leaders interact with the population in specific projects, the aid from the United States is actually a source of legitimacy in the eyes of the population,

All groups in the study stated that people have fears about a political transition. The most common are that: (1) there will be violence and revenge; (2) that exiles will take away their homes, and (3) that people will lose access to free education and health care. These fears are at odds with declarations made by many opposition groups. For example, the Agreement for Democracy is a document signed in 1998 by 46 opposition groups in the United States and 23 groups in Cuba. In it, the groups acknowledge that: (1) the citizens have the right to public health and education, (2) people should be protected from arbi-

trary expulsion from their homes, and (3) people should be protected from arbitrary aggression. The apparent disjunction between fears of political change in Cuba and the declared commitments of opposition groups could be explained by deficient communication between these groups and the general population. The CEON questionnaire also asked if activists perceive that there are fears in the population about a transition to a market economy. Fifty-seven percent of the groups in the study say that at least some people have fears about a transition to markets. For example, people fear a high degree of unemployment and losing a social safety net, e.g., retirement benefits.

Although there are fears of possible consequences from political and economic transitions, activists maintain that citizens want transitions to democracy and to markets. A question in the study asked how important fears in the population concerning transitions are in accounting for the low degree of popular participation in activities promoted by civil society groups. Sixty-six percent of the groups think that the low level of participation is not due to fears about possible consequences of transitions. The rest of the groups estimate that these fears of transition are a minor factor in accounting for the level of participation.

Let us make one final point about the level of participation in opposition activities by citizens in the population at large. The study asked about the effect that the process of legal migration to the United States has on participation. The question asked, "do people who are in the legal process of leaving Cuba for the United States tend to evade more, than those who are not in such process, participation in activities of independent groups or collaboration with these groups?" All responses were affirmative. Being in the process of legal migration decreases the likelihood of involvement with the opposition. The migration accords with the United States seem politically beneficial for the Castro government.

## THE ABSENCE OF EFFECTIVE CHANNELS OF INDEPENDENT COMMUNICATION IN CUBA

A key conclusion in the last section of this report is that independent sources of communications capable of regularly reaching most of the population are essential for a political transition to take place under the Castro regime. Civil society activists must be able to spread their messages widely. People must receive systematically news and information that can undermine the dictatorship. But the ability of independent sources of communication to reach most of the Cuban population is a missing ingredient in the mixture of conditions that can promote a transition under the current autocracy. In the 1990s, numerous problems have weakened the dictatorship, like poor economic performance and greater social discontent. The opposition movement has grown. But effective, independent channels of communication have been absent.

Besides the publications of the Catholic Church, there have been few independent (*samizdat*) publications produced and distributed in Cuba. During 2000 an increase in *samizdat* publications took place in Cuba. However, their production has been limited.<sup>4</sup> TV Martí is mostly not seen on the island, and the jamming of Radio Martí has increased over time.<sup>5</sup>

The CEON study included a battery of questions on independent sources of communication in Cuba. One of the benefits of these data is that questions address the issue of *samizdat* publications inside Cuba. Another contribution the data makes is that, to our knowledge, there has been no audience study (at least one that has been made public) of Radio or TV Martí since 1995. And in the second half of the 1990s, the Castro government installed more jamming equipment to interfere with Radio Martí broadcasts.

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4. See the *Steps to Freedom 2000* report.

5. For detailed and comparative analyses of foreign radio broadcasts in Cuba and in Eastern Europe, including most of the available data of audience studies for Radio and TV Martí, see Juan J. López, *Democratizing Cuba: Lessons from Eastern Europe and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming in 2002.)

All the groups in the study affirm that, with the exception of the publications of the Catholic Church, there are extremely few *samizdat* publications produced and distributed in Cuba. Groups say that there are no publications or that some appeared but were discontinued or that there are few with very limited production; only one group mentioned this last alternative. Is absence of *samizdat* in Cuba mainly due to government repression or to something else? Some in the United States argue that the production of *samizdat* in Cuba is impossible because of the high degree of government repression. The CEON study undermines this claim. Only one group argues that repression is the key reason for the absence of *samizdat*. Eighty-six percent of the groups say that the fundamental cause for the lack of *samizdat* in Cuba is that civil society groups do not have the resources (e.g., paper, printers, ink and money) necessary for the production and distribution of *samizdat*. One group states that the production and distribution of *samizdat* in Cuba would be a powerful weapon in the hands of civil society.

Some questions were about TV and Radio Martí. Every group says that the population cannot tune in to TV Martí programming. TV Martí programs can only be watched at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. With respect to Radio Martí (RM), respondents say that reception is more difficult in some areas than others, by time of day and by band. It is better on short wave than on AM. Two groups mention that the AM frequency is completely jammed. Jamming is worse in the cities than in the countryside. It is reported that in Havana and in Santiago de Cuba, jamming is particularly severe. Reception is better at night and during the early morning hours. It seems that the Cuban government makes greater efforts to interfere RM broadcasts in areas and at times where the potential audience is larger. RM is the most important source of independent news and information for the people in Cuba, in terms of the potential audience and focus of the programming. Despite intense jamming of RM programs, eighty-three percent of the groups estimate that the majority of the population tries to tune in to RM. This is indicative of the craving for news and information

from independent sources among the people in Cuba.

Given that the reception of RM is better on short-wave, it is of interest to report answers to a question about whether an important impediment to hearing RM is scarcity of short-wave radios in the population. Sixty-six percent of the groups say that scarcity of short-wave radios is an important factor. Two of these groups qualify their affirmative answer. One group says that when radios are taken to government repair shops, the short-wave capability is de-activated. Another group argues that although the percentage of people that do not tune in to RM because they do not have a short-wave radio is small, the short-wave radios that most people have are of poor quality, making reception of RM more difficult. This group maintains that with a good quality short-wave radio, the reception of RM is better.

Answers to the question of what it would take for independent groups to widely disseminate their messages in the population synthesize the main points in this section of the report. All groups mention one or both of the following: (1) more material resources in the hands of civil society groups, e.g., equipment to write and print; and (2) for foreign radio and TV broadcasts to actually reach most of the people and serve as surrogate stations for the opposition, both in Cuba and in exile, transmitting messages of democratic activists and news about their activities. One group mentions that something desirable is to have publications and videos circulate in Cuba with themes that tend to awaken hope that change is possible.

#### **HOW WILL A POLITICAL TRANSITION TAKE PLACE?**

A number of questions in the study asked activists their views about the process of transition in Cuba. The answers show two things. One is that groups do not present a clear, overall idea of how a political transition can take place. More discussion and analyses could sharpen strategic visions. However, groups in the study are on the right track. They mentioned necessary components of the most likely transition path under the Castro regime. Combining the answers of all the groups, one finds the following re-

sponses to the question of how activists think that a transition to democracy could be achieved: (1) in a peaceful way, (2) with cooperation among opposition groups, (3) with people expressing what they really feel, (4) with international pressure on the Cuban government and support for the democratic resistance, and (5) when a national conscience of change is created. Yet no group includes all these aspects in its answer. This again indicates that more discussion about the process of transitions could be beneficial to guide the tactics and strategies of civil society groups in their struggle for democratization.

One surprising finding of the study is that all the groups affirmed that their members have little knowledge of how political transitions took place in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s. The visits to activists in Cuba of former members of civil society groups in Eastern Europe under communist rule, the literature that has been sent from abroad to independent groups in Cuba and whatever programs in Radio Martí have covered this topic have not been enough. The CEON data calls for a re-evaluation, with expert advice, of the type and quantity of information that has been sent to civil society groups in Cuba about the processes of transition in Eastern Europe.

The CEON study asked groups whether it is possible to attain a political transition while Fidel Castro is alive. All the groups said that it is possible. Only one group hedged its answer and mentioned that although possible, it is unlikely. One implication from these responses is that most independent groups in Cuba are not waiting for the death of Fidel Castro to push for a transition.

Groups in the study mention that among independent groups there are disagreements about how a transition should take place. One issue of contention is whether the Cuban government should play a role in the transition. Two groups in the CEON study envision softliners (political reformers) inside the regime playing a role. Their idea is that softliners could gain power and, with pressure from below, the political reformers would negotiate a transition.

However, a negotiated transition does not depend on the existence of civil society groups alone, but on the emergence of softliners in the regime with enough power to constrain hardliners over time and carry out negotiations with members of the opposition. In East Germany, for example, there were independent groups that sought negotiations with the communist government. Yet in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, transitions took place without any real negotiation, in contrast to the transitions in Poland and Hungary. The negotiations in Czechoslovakia turned into logistics about how and when the communists were going to leave power.

What is important for transitions in hardline regimes like the one in Cuba is what civil society groups do to generate a feeling of political efficacy in the population so that civic resistance increases. The important question in Cuba is if independent groups are willing to carry out activities that can generate pressure from below. The answer seems to be yes. As already mentioned above, groups want to communicate with the population in ways that could build a sense that change is possible. Groups want to disseminate information about government abuses, about democracy and human rights and about acts of defiance. All these things promote a transition.

A number of questions in the study referred to the issue of “unity” or coordination of efforts among opposition groups in Cuba. Activists in all the groups that participated in the study think that greater consensus among independent groups about tactics, strategies and short-term objectives is very important to advance toward a political transition. Eighty percent of the groups in the study believe that it is possible to reach greater consensus among civil society groups. All groups in the study say that there is willingness among independent groups, at least among some of them, to work together.

Groups mention a number of obstacles in achieving greater agreement in civil society; some of these are: (1) “caudillismo” or “protagonismo”—self-conceit/self-advancement among some individuals pretending to be the best leaders; (2) mistrust; (3) distance—the problems of transportation and communication between Havana and other regions of the country;

(4) disagreement about a number of issues, e.g., pro- and anti-embargo and how a transition should take place; and (5) attempts by the repressive apparatus to divide the opposition movement. Although complete agreement and coordination among all groups is a utopia, there is room and willingness for greater coordination among opposition groups. This does not mean that at this moment there is zero coordination. There is substantial evidence that civil society groups in Cuba are not “atomized” (as some people in the United States argue) and do coordinate their activities.

### THE NEED FOR MATERIAL ASSISTANCE

The fact that Cuba is not Poland does not mean that material assistance to civil society groups in Cuba is not of vital importance to promote a transition to democracy. Several questions in the study are related to material assistance for civil society groups in Cuba.

One of the most effective repressive tactics of the Cuban government is trying to strangle economically civil society activists. One question asked how an activist could earn a living if the person were fired from his/her job for political reasons. All groups mentioned that it is very hard for an activist to find sustenance under such condition. The individual has few options available since the possibility of legal self-employment is also closed (dissidents do not get licenses to work on their own). In such cases, people can: (1) engage in illicit activities, providing the government an additional reason to repress the person; (2) depend on assistance provided by family members or friends—who typically do not have much themselves; and (3) depend on assistance from abroad. One group mentions that economic repression is effective in decreasing membership in civil society groups, people refrain from joining or end their membership. Yet the effectiveness of the economic repression by the Castro government against democratic activists can be undermined by humanitarian aid to activists from abroad.

One question asked, “what do independent groups need to be more effective in achieving their objectives?” Sixty-six percent of the groups mentioned material assistance from abroad, e.g., equipment, money, and humanitarian aid. The same number of

groups also mentioned that they need information or advice, e.g., help in determining a strategy, knowledge about the methods that the repressive apparatus uses in dividing the opposition, and educational materials about civic struggles against autocracies.

Communication among civil society groups is necessary to better coordinate their activities, something that can increase the effectiveness of the democracy movement in Cuba. One question in the study asked, “would it be possible to establish an effective communication network among independent groups?” Every group in the study maintains that it is possible to establish an effective network. All the groups, except one, argue that in order to create such communication network the groups need resources. One suggestion is to have a coordinating center in Miami to which all groups could have access. Another idea is to have regular meetings among members of different groups in Cuba.

### THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND DEMOCRATIC ACTIVISTS

Several questions alluded to the behavior of the Catholic Church in Cuba toward independent groups and activists. Eighty-three percent of the groups in the study perceive that there are divisions in the Church about helping the opposition movement. A question asked whether it would be possible to channel material assistance to civil society groups through the Church. Eighty-three percent of the groups think that it is not possible. All the groups affirm that the Church has provided very little or no assistance to civil society groups.

Sixty-six percent of the groups think that churches can serve as spaces where democratic activists can communicate with each other and with the population. Activists in the study argue that there are opportunities for conducting symbolic acts of protests in churches, such as masses on behalf of political prisoners, but such opportunities are very limited. For example, doing so depends on the priest in charge of the local church or on the bishop in the area and on the moment. The groups are evenly divided on whether they should use opportunities in the church and religious activities to promote political opposition among the population. Sixty-six percent of the

groups perceive that the Church hierarchy in Cuba is against allowing civil society groups to use the spaces of the church and religion to convey their messages to the population. An additional group argues that the Catholic hierarchy is divided on this issue. Groups mention that the Church hierarchy does not want to get the Church involved in politics and thereby create problems with the government.

### CONCLUSIONS

To reiterate, the data collected in this study are from focus groups composed of activists in nine independent groups inside Cuba. The responses are the opinions and perceptions of these individuals. Yet as previously discussed, the information provided here is the best available on what civil society activists think. Their perceptions of public attitudes and beliefs are a proxy for methodologically sound survey data, something impossible to attain. If we assume that the data here closely approximates opinions in most civil society groups in Cuba and attitudes and beliefs in a large segment of the general population, we can draw the following conclusions.

While the activists believe that the regime has little overall support in the population, they also believe that nationalism seems to have some importance in generating support for the government. But nationalism is not a major source of support. It does not make up for the high degree of disapproval of the regime. Policies of the American government that antagonize the dictatorship, such as providing material assistance to democratic activists and making Radio and TV Martí able to surmount jamming, are not bound to create a surge of support for the Castro government. Certainly, the endurance of the autocracy is not due to the prevalence of popular support.

The opposition activists surveyed perceive that there seems to be little loyalty among members of the Communist Party for the regime. Activists perceive that people join that Communist Party for personal gain, such as to get better jobs, rather than for ideological commitment or a desire to support the government. The high degree of corruption everywhere in the government is another indication of ideological decay in the regime. Moreover, the data suggests that there is widespread discontent with the regime

among its own cadres. The decay of ideology and the discontent among regime cadres have important political consequences. Most likely, many cadres will defect from the regime if the government is confronted with continuous mass protests to demand democratization. It is doubtful that many cadres will put up a fight to save the regime. On the contrary, one can expect that most cadres will join the forces of opposition.

The fact that the military as an institution is not involved in repression increases the chances that, in the event that some units of the political police fire on the population, members of the armed forces may side with the people. The experience of repression in the 1990s and responses to the CEON questionnaire suggest that fear of a massacre among citizens is not a key in explaining the absence of mass protests to demand democratization.

Since the Castro government is dominated by hardliners who refuse to take steps toward political liberalization and recognize opposition activists as valid interlocutors, a negotiated transition cannot take place under the Castro regime. Both theories of transitions from hardline regimes and comparative evidence show that a political transition under the Castro regime is only possible if nonviolent civic struggle empowers the democratic opposition as occurred in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. These countries had hardline regimes similar to the one in Cuba today.

Although fear of repression is certainly a factor in accounting for the low level of participation on the part of the general population in acts of opposition, the main reason is that a sense of political efficacy is not widespread among citizens. That is, most people think that their participation will be ineffective, will not make any significant contribution, in achieving political change. And since participation in such activities may very well get people into trouble with the government, people stay home. However, a sense of political efficacy can be developed. It is possible for the belief that participation in public protests can bring about change to become widespread in the population. The fundamental requirements for this to occur are communication and greater material as-

sistance in the hands of civil society groups. These are the two missing elements in Cuba in order for a political transition to take place.

Independent sources of communication must be able to regularly reach most of the population. Citizens must receive news and information that can encourage them to become involved in opposition activities. They must know about the actions and messages of opposition groups in Cuba and in exile and about international support for the opposition. The more effective civil society groups in Cuba are in carrying out their activities, the better it is for building a sense of efficacy in the population. Thus, greater material resources in the hands of civil society groups and more coordination of activities among these groups would contribute indirectly to the generation of political efficacy among citizens. People should also know about the abuses of the Castro government, not only against political dissidents but also against citizens in the general population. Feelings of outrage can trigger spontaneous protests. And specially, citizens must know about public acts of defiance, whether on the part of democratic activists or on the part of the common folk engaging in spontaneous defiance. Knowledge about civil society groups also would improve the perception that people have of these groups and increase the belief that these groups represent a democratic alternative to the dictatorship.

In addition, greater communication would serve to decrease fears among the people about what would happen after a political transition. However, people want a transition to democracy even if they have concerns about what may happen as a consequence. Fears about transitions have little importance in accounting for the low degree of popular participation in opposition activities.

Independent sources of communications regularly able to reach most of the population are essential for a political transition to take place under the Castro regime. But the ability of independent sources of communication to regularly reach most of the Cuban population is a missing ingredient in the mixture of

conditions that can promote a transition to democracy. As the Castro regime has weakened in the 1990s due to numerous problems, like poor economic performance and greater discontent, and as the civil society movement has grown, the effectiveness of independent communication has declined.

TV Martí is barely seen in Cuba. And the jamming of Radio Martí has increased over time. Radio Martí is the most important source of independent news and information for the people in Cuba. Despite intense jamming of RM programs, eighty-three percent of the groups estimate that the majority of the population tries to tune in to RM. This is indicative of the craving for news and information from independent sources among the people in Cuba. The decision by President George W. Bush to implement the technical improvements in Radio and TV Martí to substantially overcome the jamming by the Castro government is extremely important to promote a transition to democracy in Cuba.

In a White House press release on July 23, 2001, President Bush stated that,

I have told Mr. [Salvador] Lew [the new Director of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting] that my number one priority is to make sure that Radio and TV Martí are broadcast clearly to Cuba allowing every Cuban citizen access to accurate news and information. In order to do that, I have instructed him to use all available means to overcome the jamming of Radio and TV Martí. Once we open the flow of information, the demands for freedom will ring stronger than ever.<sup>6</sup>

President Bush is surely right, and we hope that his orders are implemented as soon as possible.

There have been practically no *samizdat* publications, produced and distributed in Cuba. The absence of *samizdat* in Cuba is basically due to civil society groups lacking the resources to produce and distribute this literature rather than to government repression. Independent groups would write and distribute *samizdat* if they had the money and equipment to do so. One of the goals is for the population to know

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6. "Statement by the President: Toward a Democratic Cuba," The White House Office of the Press Secretary, July 13, 2001.

more about civil society groups in Cuba, and *samizdat* can provide a more adequate channel of communication for this purpose than written material from the United States.

Although civil society groups in Cuba do not seem to have a clear, overall view of how a transition can take place, they are on the right track in the things they think are necessary for a transition under the Castro regime. Activists in Cuba could benefit by greater discussion and expert advice concerning the processes of transition under hardline regimes. Civil society groups have less knowledge about how the transitions occurred in Eastern Europe than is usually assumed. More analyses of the processes of transition among groups could serve to increase the level of agreement about tactics and strategies to follow. Yet what is important for civil society groups to play their role as catalysts in fostering a transition is what they do to generate a feeling of political efficacy in the population so that nonviolent civic struggle can increase. Opposition groups in Cuba are willing to do what it takes. Groups want to disseminate information about government abuses, about democracy and human rights, about acts of opposition to the Castro government. All these things serve to build a sense in the population that change is possible. Most activists in Cuba support the strategy of increasing civic resistance to peacefully confront the government with demands for political change and are not waiting for the death of Fidel to push for a transition. What is holding back the process is not Fidel's biological clock.

All groups in the study say that there is willingness among independent groups, at least among some of them, to work together. Although complete agreement and coordination among all groups is a utopia, there is room and willingness for greater coordination among opposition groups. So more efforts in promoting coordination among groups are likely to be fruitful. This does not mean that at this moment there is zero coordination. There is plenty of evidence that civil society groups in Cuba are not atomized.

To be more effective in their struggle for democratization, civil society groups need much more material assistance from abroad, sent systematically. Humanitarian aid can neutralize the government tactic of economic repression against activists and increase membership in civil society groups. Activists could also devote more of their time and energy to the struggle. It seems possible to establish an effective network of communication among activists in Cuba. But again, they need equipment and money.

Activists do not perceive that American aid harms their image in the eyes of the population. Some critics of increasing material assistance to democratic activists in Cuba claim that doing so would subject activists to increased repression. This argument is flimsy. Civil society activists are subject to repression all the time, regardless of the aid they receive from abroad. Greater material assistance will make independent groups more effective in undermining the dictatorship despite the repression. And bringing democracy to Cuba is the way to effectively end the repression. A question in the study asked activists if they think that there is anything that can be done to decrease the effectiveness of Castro's repressive apparatus. Every group believes that it is possible to do so. The answers vary, but eighty percent of the groups mentioned things that are connected with having more material resources: (1) greater coordination of efforts among opposition groups; (2) economic and moral help from abroad; (3) educational materials, workshops and radio programs about repression; and (4) greater ability to communicate with the population.

Increased aid to the internal opposition and greater effectiveness in radio and television transmissions to Cuba are clearly essential to empowering Cuba's pro-democracy movement. What is to be done is fairly clear. If these initiatives are implemented, a transition to democracy in Cuba is in sight. We hope that this will be the case. The end of the communist nightmare in Cuba is long overdue.

## APPENDIX Questionnaire

1. ¿Cuál creen ustedes que es el grado de apoyo genuino al gobierno por parte de la población?
  2. ¿Cuán importante creen ustedes que es el sentido de nacionalismo en el apoyo popular al régimen? ¿En otras palabras, es verdad que muchas personas apoyan al gobierno al creer que apoyando al gobierno se esta defendiendo la soberanía cubana de una política hostil por parte del gobierno de los Estados Unidos hacia el gobierno cubano?
  3. ¿Qué grado de éxito tiene el gobierno en captar nuevos miembros para el partido y otras organizaciones?
  4. ¿Por qué continúan personas ingresando como nuevos miembros al Partido Comunista?
  5. ¿Cuán extensa creen ustedes que es la corrupción entre los cuadros del gobierno?
  6. ¿Existe descontento o desmoralización entre los cuadros del gobierno, por ejemplo, miembros del partido, de los CDRs, de las organizaciones de masas, dentro de las fuerzas armadas o dentro de los aparatos de "seguridad del estado"? ¿Si es así, qué evidencia existe de descontento o desmoralización? ¿Cuán extenso creen los miembros de su grupo que es el descontento entre los cuadros del gobierno?
  7. ¿Por qué no hay más personas participando en actividades públicas de grupos políticos de oposición? ¿Por ejemplo, cuando un grupo defensor de los derechos humanos lleva a cabo un acto público, por qué no participan cientos o miles de personas?
  8. ¿Cuán importante creen ustedes que es para explicar el bajo nivel de participación popular en actividades públicas de oposición el sentido de impotencia o ineficacia política entre la población, esto es el pensar que la participación no va a ser efectiva en lograr cambios hacia la democracia, por ejemplo, libertad para los presos políticos, respeto a los derechos humanos o la caída de la dictadura?
  9. ¿En su opinión, cuál es más importante en explicar el bajo nivel de participación popular en actividades públicas de oposición: (a) el sentido de impotencia o ineficacia política o (b) el miedo a la represión?
  10. ¿Si existe un sentido de impotencia política entre la población, a qué se debe este sentido de impotencia? ¿Cómo se podría lograr que aumente el sentido de efectividad política entre la población? ¿Qué obstáculos existen para desarrollar el sentido de efectividad política en la población?
  11. ¿Existen temores dentro de la población a que haya una transición a la democracia? ¿Si es así, cuáles son estos temores? ¿Cuán generalizados están estos temores en la población?
  12. ¿Existen temores dentro de la población a que haya una transición a una economía de mercado bajo un régimen democrático? ¿Si es así, cuáles son estos temores? ¿Cuán generalizados están estos temores en la población?
  13. ¿Para explicar el bajo nivel de participación en actividades independientes, cuán importantes son los temores de la gente a cambios políticos o económicos?
  14. ¿Cuáles son las aspiraciones políticas, sociales y económicas de la población?
  15. ¿Las personas que están en el proceso legal de irse de Cuba hacia los Estados Unidos, evaden más que las que no están en ese proceso el participar en actividades de grupos independientes o colaborar con estos?
  16. ¿Desde la perspectiva de la población, son vistos los líderes de grupos independientes como personas con fuertes convicciones democráticas? ¿En otras palabras, son vistos estos líderes como una alternativa democrática?
  17. ¿Ve la población a los líderes de grupos independientes como personas que tratarían de satisfacer las aspiraciones sociales, económicas y políticas de la población bajo un régimen democrático?
  18. ¿Qué grado de simpatía existe dentro de la población en general hacia las actividades de grupos independientes tales como grupos políticos, sindicatos o periodistas independientes?
- ¿Existe apoyo popular a estos grupos? ¿Cuál es la evidencia de simpatía o apoyo? ¿Varía la simpatía o apo-

yo de acuerdo al tipo de grupo, por ejemplo, grupos políticos comparados con grupos defensores de la ecología?

19. ¿Con qué grado de legitimidad ve la población a grupos independientes y a sus líderes?

20. ¿Es la imagen de los líderes de grupos independientes dañada ante los ojos de la población si se sabe que estos reciben ayuda de grupos de apoyo en los Estados Unidos?

21. ¿Cuáles son las aspiraciones políticas, sociales y económicas de los miembros de su grupo para Cuba? ¿Cuán extensa es la discusión entre los grupos opositores en Cuba sobre los objetivos políticos, sociales y económicos bajo un régimen democrático? ¿Si no hay mucha discusión sobre estos temas—por qué? ¿Qué grado de consenso existe entre los grupos independientes en Cuba sobre los objetivos políticos, económicos y sociales para una Cuba futura?

22. ¿Existe alguna literatura independiente (*samizdat*) dentro de Cuba (que sea producida y distribuida directamente dentro de Cuba)? ¿Si no existe, por qué? ¿Si existe, cuán extensa es? ¿Qué obstáculos hay para incrementar una literatura independiente en Cuba?

23. ¿Qué sería necesario para que los grupos independientes pudieran diseminar extensamente sus mensajes dentro de la población en Cuba?

24. ¿Cuál es la calidad de recepción de Radio Martí en Cuba? ¿Cómo varía la calidad de recepción por área geográfica y por onda de transmisión (onda AM y onda corta)?

25. ¿Cuál es la calidad de recepción de TV Martí en Cuba? ¿Como varía la calidad de recepción por área geográfica?

26. ¿Qué opinan ustedes del contenido de las programaciones de Radio Martí? ¿Qué cambios les gustaría que se hicieran en el contenido de estas programaciones?

27. ¿Además de Radio Martí, que otras transmisiones radiales del exterior se oyen en Cuba? ¿Cuál es la calidad de recepción de estas otras transmisiones? ¿Como varía la calidad de recepción por área geográfica y por onda de transmisión?

28. ¿Cuánta gente estiman ustedes que oyen regularmente transmisiones de Radio Martí o de otras estaciones radiales del exterior?

29. ¿Es la escasez de radios de onda corta dentro de la población un impedimento importante en poder oír las transmisiones radiales del exterior?

30. ¿Cómo piensa su grupo que se va a lograr la transición a la democracia?

31. ¿Cuáles son las diferentes visiones de los grupos independientes sobre la manera en que se logrará la transición a la democracia en Cuba? ¿Qué grado de discrepancia o consenso existe entre estas visiones?

32. ¿Qué grado de conocimiento tienen los miembros de su grupo sobre cómo se lograron las transiciones políticas en Europa Oriental en 1989, por ejemplo, sobre el papel de los activistas en la sociedad civil y el de las comunicaciones, sobre el origen y desarrollo de las protestas masivas, sobre los lemas que la gente cantaba en las demostraciones?

33. ¿Piensan los miembros de su grupo que la transición es posible estando Fidel Castro en vida o hay que esperar a que muera?

34. ¿Qué diferencias existen entre los grupos independientes en términos de objetivos?

¿Cuál es el grado de división?

35. ¿Qué aceptación tendría entre los miembros de su grupo la estrategia de fomentar (en algún momento) demostraciones masivas en las calles para confrontar de una manera pacífica al gobierno con demandas de reformas políticas? ¿Cómo se sabría que ha llegado el momento de llevar a cabo esta estrategia? ¿Si la aceptación de esta estrategia es poca entre los miembros de su grupo, por qué?

36. ¿Están los militares envueltos directamente en la represión? ¿Percibe el pueblo a las fuerzas armadas como responsables por la represión? ¿Perciben los grupos independientes una diferencia entre los oficiales a cargo del aparato represivo y las fuerzas armadas como institución militar?

37. ¿Si miles de personas demandaran cambios políticos en una demostración pacífica, como ocurrió en países de Europa Oriental en 1989, creen miembros de su grupo que los organismos de represión dispa-

rían con armas de fuego en contra de la población? ¿Creen ustedes que la gente en general piensa que organismos de represión dispararían con armas de fuego en contra de la población? Si existe este temor, creen ustedes que es posible que aun con este miedo la gente estaría dispuesta a demandar democratización en las calles si ellos creyeran que su participación sería efectiva en lograr cambios políticos?

38. ¿Creen ustedes que grupos independientes deberían mantener algunos miembros anónimos para salvaguardarlos de arrestos y permitir que sirvan de reservas para continuar las labores del grupo en caso de que los miembros conocidos por los órganos de represión sean encarcelados o neutralizados?

39. ¿Existen esfuerzos de organizar a la población en actividades independientes, aunque no sean en si actividades de oposición política, por ejemplo, en defensa de la ecología, en peticiones a las autoridades para resolver problemas críticos en las comunidades como alimentación, suministro de medicinas o de agua potable? ¿A quien son las peticiones para resolver problemas en las comunidades dirigidas? ¿A las autoridades locales del partido?

40. ¿Sería posible organizar huelgas en centros de trabajo grandes y en sectores importantes de la economía? ¿Si no es viable, por qué?

41. ¿Cuál es el grado de voluntad entre los grupos independientes para trabajar coordinadamente? ¿Cuál es el grado de aislamiento entre los grupos independientes? ¿Qué obstáculos existen en coordinar esfuerzos?

42. ¿Cuán importante sería el lograr un mayor consenso entre los grupos independientes sobre tácticas, estrategias y objetivos a corto y mediano plazo para avanzar en la lucha por lograr una transición hacia la democracia? ¿Cuán factible es lograr un mayor consenso entre los grupos respecto a estos temas?

43. ¿Si una persona es despedida de su trabajo por ser catalogado como opositor político o disidente, de qué manera(s) puede esa persona ganarse un sustento económico?

44. ¿Qué necesitan los grupos independientes para ser más efectivos en lograr sus objetivos?

45. ¿Se pudiera establecer una red de comunicaciones efectiva (que sea rápida, extensa y no muy vulnerable al aparato represivo) entre los grupos independientes? ¿Qué sería necesario para establecer dicha red de comunicaciones?

46. ¿Cuán efectiva esta siendo la ayuda material y política del exterior a grupos independientes en Cuba para que estos puedan desarrollar sus actividades? ¿Cuáles son los aspectos positivos y negativos de esta ayuda? ¿Qué deberían de hacer los grupos de apoyo en el exterior para ayudar más efectivamente a los grupos independientes en Cuba?

47. ¿Se pudiera hacer algo para disminuir la efectividad del aparato represivo? ¿Qué?

¿Se pudiera hacer algo para neutralizar en alguna medida los ataques por las Brigadas de Respuesta Rápida o los actos de repudio? ¿Qué?

48. ¿Existen divisiones dentro del personal de la iglesia católica en Cuba respecto a brindar apoyo a grupos independientes?

49. ¿Se le podría suministrar recursos a grupos independientes a través de la iglesia católica?

50. ¿Han recibido ayuda grupos independientes (laicos) de la iglesia católica? ¿Si es así, cuán extensa ha sido la ayuda?

51. ¿Pueden servir las iglesias como vía de comunicación entre miembros de grupos independientes y entre éstos y la población?

52. ¿Cuáles son las posibilidades actuales de realizar actividades “simbólicas” de protesta centradas en iglesias, por ejemplo, misas por los presos políticos?

53. ¿Qué opina su grupo sobre si se deben o no utilizar las oportunidades que existen en la iglesia y la religión para promover la oposición política entre la población?

54. ¿Cuál es la posición de la jerarquía eclesiástica sobre permitir que grupos independientes utilicen esas oportunidades para llevarles sus mensajes a la población?