

WORLD CUBA

The Crisis in Cuba, Explained

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by [Chad de Guzman](#) and [Miranda Jeyaretnam](#)

MAR 17, 2026 11:30 AM CUT

The Caribbean island nation of Cuba went dark—again.

The Ministry of Energy and Mines posted on [social media](#) on March 16 that its National Electric System (SEN) suffered a “total disconnection,” without providing details as to the cause of the electrical grid collapse or how long until all of the country’s 10 million inhabitants are expected to have power again. The blackout became the third major one in the country over the past four months.

Efforts are underway to restore power, but such electrical grid collapses have become more common in Cuba, which has been, for decades, ravaged by an economic crisis that has seen acute shortages of food, fuel, and electricity. The situation has been aggravated by longstand

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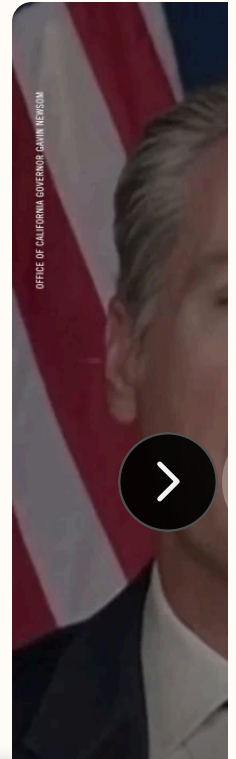
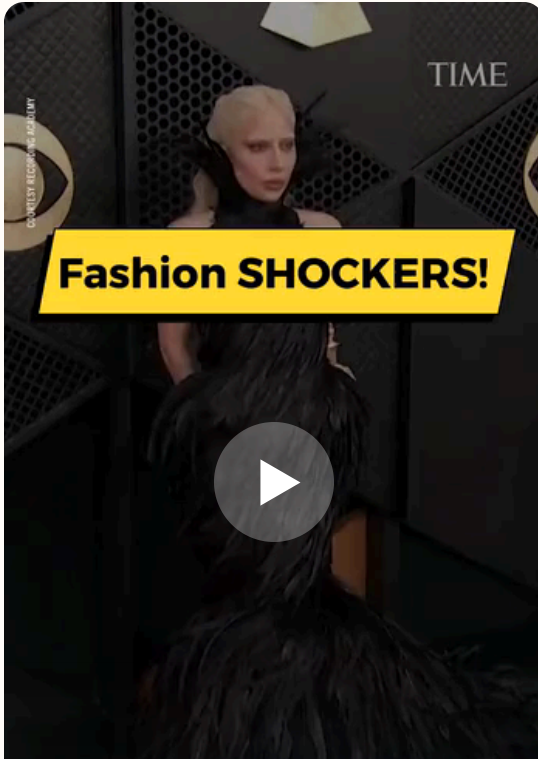
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Cuba is a socialist republic governed by one political party, the Communist Party of Cuba, which has exerted control over most aspects of Cuban life.

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For decades, Cuba has been run by the Castros, first led by the infamous revolutionary Fidel Castro, who ousted a U.S.-backed regime in Havana in 1959 and allied with the then-Soviet Union to establish Cuba as a socialist state. Before Fidel Castro died in 2016, he handed the presidency over to his brother Raúl in 2008, who led the country as the Communist Party's First Secretary until 2021. Even as Raúl Castro stepped down in 2018 to make way for incumbent President Díaz-Canel, he—and other Castro family members—remain key figures in Cuban politics.

Fidel Castro's five-decade rule shaped many of Cuba's economic policies, following a Soviet-style economic model that saw planning centralized in the government, industries and land nationalized, and foreign ownership reduced. Cuba's alliance with the Soviet Union also allowed for subsidies or discounts to resources like oil, which stabilized the island's

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Díaz-Canel, 65, has led Cuba since 2018, succeeding Raúl Castro and becoming the country's first civilian President since the 1959 Cuban Revolution. In 2021, he also became the country's Communist Party leader, making him the first person to hold both positions since the Castros.

Born in 1960 in Cuba's Villa Clara province, Díaz-Canel was trained as an electrical engineer before entering politics in his twenties. He served in provincial roles for years before making it onto the Politburo, the Communist Party's executive committee, in 2003. He served as the country's Minister of Higher Education from 2009 to 2012 and as its Vice President from 2013 to 2018 under Raúl Castro.

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Díaz-Canel has largely maintained Cuba's one-party socialist system, even as he has introduced unprecedented reforms towards economic liberalization. Seen as more of a pragmatist than his predecessors, Díaz-Canel has supported expanding small private businesses, increased internet access, and modernized parts of the economy. At the same

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Polga-Hecimovich said that for Castro, “Chávez appeared as one of the last champions of the Cuban-inspired revolutionary social and political movements that had swept Latin America and the Caribbean during the Cold War.” During a visit to Cuba in 2005, Castro told Chávez publicly that Cuba and Venezuela were like “a single nation,” dubbing their respective citizens “Venecubans.”

Beyond the ideological similarities between their leaders, Cuba and Venezuela had a mutually beneficial relationship. Havana had sought to access oil-rich Venezuela’s reserves at a lower price, while Caracas wanted to have access to Cuban intelligence, counterintelligence, and military personnel. According to the Miami Herald, Venezuela provided Cuba with 70,000 barrels of crude oil per day and refined products worth about \$1.3 billion from late 2024 to late 2025. And while Havana and Caracas have repeatedly denied their militaries’ entanglement in protecting Maduro, at least 32 Cubans died in the U.S. operation against Venezuela’s Maduro in early January.

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At the end of the 19th century, the Gulf Coast, was occupied by the United States under the condition of the Teller Amendment. The Bay.

The relationship between the U.S. and Cuba in 1959 was a turning point. The U.S. backed the Cuban Revolution and recognized the new government. The U.S. embargo, which was aimed at the U.S.-owned private companies.

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Florida as a result of the U.S. intervention in the Bay of Pigs. I defend the U.S. position in Cuba and Vietnam.

changed the U.S.-Cuba relationship. The U.S. embargo, which was aimed at the U.S.-owned private companies.

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Castro’s rule also ushered in a wave of emigration: those associated with the Batista government, or the “golden exiles” who belonged to higher social classes, fled the island in droves, out of fear of reprisal from the regime, and many of them ended up in neighboring Florida.

The U.S., particularly the CIA, famously devised a plan to recruit some of these exiles and train them for an invasion. In January 1961, the U.S. severed diplomatic ties with Cuba and instead focused on deposing Castro. By April, the U.S. pushed through with its attempted invasion of the island, with forces mainly docking at Cuba’s *Bahía de Cochinos* (Bay of Pigs) in Cuba’s southern coast. The plan, however, failed—with Cuba overpowering the U.S.-backed exiles.

The diplomatic tiff between the U.S. and Cuba almost escalated into a full-blown war in 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when Washington discovered that Havana allowed the Soviet Union to covertly install nuclear missiles on the island. Cuba and the U.S. eventually de-escalated following negotiations, but Washington continued to punish Havana. The U.S. signed several laws, which strengthened sanctions against Cuba and stated that the trade embargo would remain in place until a new government is democratically elected.

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Why is the U.S. blockading Cuba's oil?

On Jan. 29, Trump signed an executive order declaring a national emergency and accusing the Cuban government of “extraordinary actions that harm and threaten the United States.” Specifically, the executive order asserted that Cuba’s government aligns itself with and supports “numerous hostile countries, transnational terrorist groups, and malign actors adverse to the United States,” including Russia, China, and Iran. The order also accused the Cuban government of persecuting political opponents, suppressing free speech and the press, and committing other human rights violations—actions that have been documented by human rights organizations over the years.

“The United States has zero tolerance for the depredations of the communist Cuban regime,” the order said. “The United States will act to protect the foreign policy, national security, and national interests of the United States, including by holding the Cuban regime accountable for its malign actions and relationships, while also remaining committed to supporting the Cuban people’s aspirations for a free and democratic society.”

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The order that directed the U.S. to block Cuba's oil. The order was for Cuba and U.S. deposits. declared the crisis in Cuba would allow companies needed to

countries to be bound. After the oil, Trump said it is private that is

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cooking gas, gasoline, and diesel have also strained the country’s transport, food supplies, and even its water pumps, which are powered by diesel. The energy crisis has led to soaring inflation, including surging food prices, and a rapidly devaluing Cuban peso.

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Cubans have described having bursts of electricity during which they race to cook, do laundry, and charge their devices, while food—when they can afford to buy it—spoils easily whenever refrigerators lose power. On Cuba’s streets, trash and rotting food pile up as the fuel shortage has strained waste collection services, and the heat and mosquitos without electric fans have become unbearable.

Read More: [Rolling Blackouts, Hospital Shortages: How the U.S. Oil Blockade Is Impacting Cuba](#)

In February, United Nations human rights experts condemned the U.S.’s effective fuel blockade

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What has Trump said about regime change?

After toppling Venezuela’s and Iran’s leaders, Trump has hinted that Cuba could be his next target.

After the U.S. ouster of Maduro, which Díaz-Canel condemned, Trump said that “Cuba is going to be something we’ll end up talking about, because Cuba is a failing nation right now.” U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the son of Cuban exiles and a vocal critic of the Cuban government, also said, “If I lived in Havana, and I was in the government, I’d be concerned—at least a little bit.” But at the time, Trump also appeared to shirk the idea of directly intervening in Cuba, telling reporters in January, “I think it's just going to fall. I don't think we need any action.”

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statement on March 17. “We strongly condemn attempts at gross interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state, intimidation, and the use of unlawful unilateral restrictive measures.”

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The Russian ministry added that Cuba’s “unprecedented challenges” were “a direct consequence” of U.S. action against the island country and that Russia will “continue to provide Cuba with the necessary support, including material assistance.” The Kremlin said it maintains contact with the Cuban leadership.

Cuba-Russia relations have been strong since the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Writing for the Center for European Policy Analysis, academics Armando Chaguaceda and Cesar Santos say that the situation in Cuba is concerning for Russia, since the regime in Havana “offers some serious assistance to the Kremlin’s work for global illiberalism.” Popular Russian political commentator Ruslan Pankratov wrote for the Moskovskij Komsomolets in January that “the fall of Cuba would be perceived by the Global South as final proof of the inability of Russia,

China, or
America, because i

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