



# Undemocratic Systems of the Post Cold-War World

A Comparative Analysis  
of Selected States



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## **Introduction**

The Cold War was not just a rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States, but a clash of two influential ideologies affecting the political system in the context of both domestic and foreign policy. During the period of intense international tension underlying the bipolar system, the methods of attack included all range of offensives, such as conventional military conflicts, espionage, guerilla warfare, political assassinations, and propaganda campaigns, which, we argue, contributed to the emergence of isolationistic, anti-imperial or revisionist, and mostly undemocratic tendencies in countries located in different regions of the world. The regimes that emerged after or survived the end of the Cold War in 1991 provided the basis for the emergence of new autocracies that, regardless of the nature of their rule, play an integral role in today's global international system ideologically dominated by Western neoliberal values. Understanding such processes seem especially important during the times of instability and the rise of nationalist as well anti-democratic tendencies in Europe and other parts of the world, which constitutes the so-called 'crisis of the republic,' resulting from tensions related to the alleged inefficiency of connections between actors on the international stage, the COVID-19 pandemic, the outbreak of war in Ukraine, and the rising power of China.

## INTRODUCTION

The aims of the project included: (i) an in-depth understanding of the origins of undemocratic political systems in the modern world; (ii) an examination of the relationship between the socio-political changes during the Cold War; (iii) a comparison of the origin of undemocratic political systems of countries located in different parts of the world; (iv) identifying their characteristics and ideologies in order to find similarities between them; (v) raising the awareness of the development of undemocratic political systems; (vi) understanding the functioning of authoritarian and totalitarian states in the contemporary international system; (vii) an examination of the role of historical processes in shaping contemporary socio-political realities; and finally (viii) sharing the facts about selected contemporary non-democratic political systems.

The subject of the monograph, which is a product of six months of research into the nature and role of selected states, is a comparative analysis of four diverse non-democratic systems integrated into the international processes of the post-Cold War world, namely, the Republic of Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and finally the Russian Federation. The choice of the cases was motivated by their varied degrees of importance in the modern world, their different cultural affiliations and geographic locations (Latin America, Far East, Middle East, and Eastern Europe), as well as their narrative identification with so-called 'rogue states' being a threat to the contemporary democratic neoliberal and capitalist world political system.

During the research, the authors examined the historical origins, state ideology, government characteristics, economic system and social features of each of the regimes analyzed, as well as their importance in the international system. The researchers used primary and secondary sources, as well as literature on political science and international relations. Empirical data obtained during case studies were used to perform a comparative analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

The research was based on a qualitative dataset using historical, institutional, and interpretive approaches, as well as descriptive methodology. To perform a comparative analysis, the Qualitative Comparative Analysis was implemented.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first four are case studies of each regime. In chapter one, Dawid Berbeć investigates the characteristics of the Cuban regime focusing on the island's occupation and colonial experience, its political and economic dependence on foreign powers, its struggle for independence, and its sovereignty. Havana chose the socialist path of anti-imperialist revolution, and the inspiration drawn from the Soviet model became the basis for the establishing of a non-democratic system. In chapter two, Monika Kwiatkowska analyses the characteristics of North Korea's totalitarian system by examining the historical origins of not only the formation of the system itself, but also Korean imperial traumas, which later became the cornerstone of the isolationist foreign policy and anti-American state narrative. She also focuses on the impact of Marxist ideology and Soviet occupation after 1945 during the process of the state building. In chapter three, Nikol Czaplińska together with Dawid Berbeć study the case of Iran and the roots of its strong anti-imperial anti-Western ideology based on Islam, which constitutes a nationalistic bedrock for the Iranian authorities, while emphasizing the significance of foreign interventions. In chapter four, Tomasz Kubiak focuses on the historical, cultural and institutional genesis of autocratic Russia, the successor to the Cold War superpower, the USSR, and examines the Russian mentality which enables the use of the 'Russian world' ideology by Moscow.

In chapter five, Monika Kwiatkowska and Dawid Berbeć analyze the meaning and role of 'rogue states' in contemporary globalized and interconnected world by examining the characteristics of the post-Cold War international system, the nature of revisionist

## INTRODUCTION

tendencies, the potential threat to neoliberal world posed by undemocratic systems, the theory behind the term of 'rogue states' itself, and finally, the means of mutual help, as well as cooperation between undemocratic systems in order to protect the interests of each regime and its position in the international arena.

In chapter six, Monika Kwiatkowska undertakes a comparative analysis of all four countries on the basis of the obtained qualitative data contained in the first five chapters of the monograph, and then interprets the results in conclusions regarding the role of the Cold War processes in strengthening undemocratic nature of systems integral with the conditions of the post-Cold War international arena.

The monograph is a concise synthesis of a complex phenomenon on the international arena and represents an introduction to further research by the authors who, at the time of its writing, were full-time students of International Relations, aspiring to start their academic career in the field of social sciences. The project would not have been possible without the support of the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and Professor Małgorzata Kiwior-Filo, an outstanding researcher of undemocratic systems, our supervisor and mentor.

Monika Kwiatkowska  
Kraków, 2023

## CHAPTER ONE

# The Republic of Cuba

Dawid Berbeć 

**Abstract:** The moment when Fidel Castro entered Havana in January of 1959 irreversibly changed the course of Cuban history. Due to its geographical proximity to the United States of America, Cuba was always present in Washington's foreign policy agenda, which made this Caribbean country highly vulnerable to American influence. One of the results of the Cuban Revolution was the pursue for the unlimited sovereignty and autonomy from any imperial power. Cubans have succeeded in it only partially: while no other country could interfere in their internal affairs any longer, during the Cold War they heavily relied on Soviet Union's support and since the early 1960s until now Cuba is a subject of a strong economic and political pressure of the USA. The aim of the article is to examine the historical roots of Cuban nondemocratic mechanisms, as well as present the process of political system evolution and ideological principles of the regime. Moreover, the author highlights the significance of impact of imperialism and Cold War politics on Cuban society and economy.

**Key words:** Cuba; Cold War; anti-imperialism; the Cuban Revolution; the USA; Fidel Castro

‘A revolution is not a trail of roses. . .  
A revolution is a fight to the death between the future and the past.’  
– Fidel Castro<sup>1</sup>

## Historical Background

Cuba has been affected by imperialism since the very beginning of its history. The island was discovered by the Spanish expedition led by Christopher Columbus in 1492.<sup>2</sup> What is seen as a momentous achievement in European history meant a great tragedy for the indigenous tribes in Cuba, which were exterminated by the colonizers in the early sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Alongside, the Spaniards began to develop the colonial infrastructure. Although the initial goal of the expedition was to find sources of precious metals and Cuba had none, its unique and strategic geographic location made it a perfect stop on a long journey from Europe to the Americas, as well as a perfect place for Spanish ships carrying New Worlds treasures to get a military escort.<sup>4</sup> Cuba’s wealth was not based on ore, but on tobacco, cattle, and most significantly, sugar.<sup>5</sup>

Sugar cane was grown on many Caribbean islands as well as in Guyana. This changed in 1804 in Haiti, when a French colony Saint Dominique was overthrown by a local slave rebellion resulting in a collapse of the sugar production on the island. That event determined the future of Cuba’s economy: since Cuba acquired a monopolistic status in sugar production, its tobacco plantations

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<sup>1</sup> Fidel Castro’s speech on the second anniversary of the triumph of the revolution, 2 January 1961.

<sup>2</sup> P. Brenner, P. Eisner, *Cuba Libre: A 500-Year Quest for Independence*, Lanham 2018, pp. 21-22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> H. Thomas, “Cuba c. 1750–c. 1860”, in L. Bethell (ed.), *Cuba: A Short History*, New York 1993, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> E. Galeano, *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*, Buenos Aires 2004, p. 25.

and forests were replaced by haciendas pursuing the cultivation of the most profitable crop.<sup>6</sup> This mono-cultural economy prevented any potential industrial development of the island. In the emerged system, called *saharocracia*, only the Spanish authorities, the privileged elite and the owners of sugar plantations were thriving, whereas the rest of the society were deteriorating. The whole enterprise caused irreversible damages to the natural environment and made the future generations of Cubans strive with being dependent on the sugar market.<sup>7</sup>

Another aspect which was shaped by colonialism was Cuban racial demography. The plantation system could only function thanks to the physical work of African slaves. Until 1762, as many as 50 thousand of them were brought to Cuba. In the following decades the numbers multiplied. The slave trade was not stopped by the changes in international law which forbade such operations,<sup>8</sup> and forced labor continued in Cuba until 1886.<sup>9</sup>

The economy based on sugar turned out to be a profitable model for Spain, yet its oversea Western hemisphere empire was in decline. After the insurrection wars in the region, several countries declared independence (Peru, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, El Salvador and Mexico). The revolutionary wave reached also the Caribbean islands (Costa Rica and Haiti),<sup>10</sup> but the question of Cuban independence remained a complicated one. The first of many reasons for that was the aforementioned monopoly on sugar. Thus, it was no surprise that this one of Madrid's last colonial territories

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 90-92.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 94-97.

<sup>8</sup> A. Dembicz, *Kuba*, Warszawa 1969, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> S. Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery*, New York 2010, p. 347.

<sup>10</sup> K. Krzywicka, *Bicentenario de la Independencia de América Latina. Cambios y realidades*, Lublin 2012, pp. 11-12.

was perceived by the Spaniards as the springboard to rebuild the empire and regain regional domination.<sup>11</sup>

What is more, Cuban's elite seemed to be pleased with the Spanish reign and supported it. As evidenced by the events of the 1850s and 1860s, their motivation was purely financial. When the period of prosperity granted by high prices of sugar on the world market ended, the warm feelings of the richest Cubans for the Spanish crown subsided, and one of the last Spanish colonies in Latin America began its struggle for independence. When institutional methods, like advocacy in Spanish parliament, failed and the conditions of living kept worsening, the uprising appeared inevitable.<sup>12</sup>

Eventually, the Ten Years War began in 1868.<sup>13</sup> Fighting quickly spread over the neighbor provinces. Spain reacted with condemning the insurrection and sent over a hundred thousand military troops over the years. During the war, both sides faced numerous internal issues as well. In Spain, the abdication of queen Isabel II started a chain of political changes in the country, and the Cuban guerillas were decentralized and poorly organized. What is more, the original leaders of the insurrection died or emigrated.<sup>14</sup> Due to the lack of clear military predominance, neither side was able to win. As a result, the war left the island under the colonial power and devastated the economy since many sugar plantations and factories were destroyed. This created an opportunity for political and economic investments, which was seized by US companies in the following years.

The fragile peace, based on the Treaty of Zanjón, lasted until 1894. The next revolt was mostly designed and planned by José

<sup>11</sup> T. Łepkowski (ed.), *Dzieje Ameryki Łacińskiej*, t. 1, Warszawa 1977, p. 321.

<sup>12</sup> M.F. Gawrycki, N. Bloch, *Kuba*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 21-23.

<sup>13</sup> L. Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 3: *From Independence to c. 1870*, Cambridge 1985, p. 296.

<sup>14</sup> H. Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.



Martí, a Cuban national hero, also known as the ‘apostle of independence,’ a poet, academic, publisher, and revolutionary, who spent most of his life in exile. Despite that, he was committed to the idea of *Cuba Libre* (free Cuba). Martí not only prepared a diplomatic ground for the revolution aiming to finally gain an independence from Spain, but also worked closely with Cuban military veterans. His cooperation with the military focused on preparing an invasion and seizing the control over the island.<sup>15</sup> As regards the future Cuban government, Martí pushed for more civilian controlled cabinet while veteran generals of previous independence efforts, Antonio Maceo and Maximo Gomez, opted to create a military government. Martí died in 1895 and his ideas were never implemented in Cuban politics.<sup>16</sup>

After three years of fighting, new leaders of the revolution welcomed the idea of getting American military support. Washington was initially reluctant towards the idea of armed intervention; the US authorities believed that their business safety would rather be granted by Spain than new Cuban government. Finally however, under the pressure of public opinion, President Grover Cleveland decided to send soldiers to fight against Spain. Thus, Cuban independence war transformed into a clash of two great powers. The Spanish-American war, which ended in 1902, resulted in the victory of Americans and Washington’s occupation of the island. Since that moment, Cuba started to be both economically and politically dependent on the United States.<sup>17</sup>

Cuba changed into a *de facto* American colony. In 1920s, private capital from the USA controlled 60% of Cuban sugar production and 90% of the island’s electrical business. What is more, the Cuban

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<sup>15</sup> A.J. López, *José Martí: A Revolutionary Life*, Austin 2014, pp. 228-229; M.F. Gawrycki, N. Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> O. Montero, *José Martí: An Introduction*, New York 2004, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> P. Brenner, *From Confrontation to Negotiation: U.S. Relations with Cuba*, New York 2018, p. 21.

The Cold War was not just a rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States, but a clash of two influential ideologies affecting the political system in the context of both domestic and foreign policy. During the period of intense international tension underlying the bipolar system, the methods of attack included all range of offensives which contributed to the emergence of isolationistic, anti-imperial or revisionist, and mostly undemocratic tendencies in Russia, Cuba, Iran and North Korea, states located in different regions of the world. The regimes emerged after or survived the end of the Cold War in 1991 and provided the basis for the rise of new autocracies that, regardless of the nature of their rule, play an integral role in today's global international system ideologically dominated by Western neoliberal values.

Understanding such processes seem especially important during the times of instability and the rise of nationalist as well anti-democratic tendencies in Europe and other parts of the world, which constitutes the so-called 'crisis of the republic,' resulting from tensions related to the alleged inefficiency of connections between actors on the international stage, the COVID-19 pandemic, the outbreak of war in Ukraine, and the rising power of China. The monograph comprehensively analyses nature of the four selected contemporary regimes with regard to the Cold War mechanisms and their international impact on democracy's condition.

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