

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN CUBA

II REPORT / 2023



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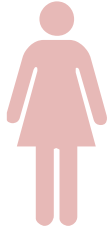
INTRODUCTION

This report presents the key findings from the second study conducted by the **Social Rights Observatory (Observatorio de Derechos Sociales - Cuba)** on religious freedom in Cuba. The collected sample for this study is more extensive compared to the previous one, covering all **15 provinces of Cuba** (Isla de la Juventud was excluded) and a total of **83 municipalities** (23 more than in the previous field work). Additionally, numerous questions have been expanded or modified to improve the interpretation of previous study results and to consolidate and update the data reported in early 2022.

The ability to conduct these independent, objective, and systematic investigations into the religious landscape of Cuba has been made possible through the dedication and perseverance of a team of data collaborators. Additionally, the valuable support and guidance from international experts have played a crucial role in this endeavor.

METHODOLOGY AND TECHNICAL DATA

TECHNICAL DATA



UNIVERSE: Population residing in Cuba aged 18 and over, both sexes.

SAMPLE: 1,394 interviews.

SAMPLING METHOD: Stratified cluster sample with respondent selection via intercept with age, sex, and residence quotas.

ALLOCATION: Proportional by province.

ERROR MARGIN: +/- 2.62 points for global data.

CONFIDENCE LEVEL: 95% with probability p/p=50%.

FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY: Personal survey with interviewers, with assisted data entry using mobile phones and tablets.

FIELD WORK DATES: February 2 - March 1, 2023.



The number of interviews was distributed proportionally to each province's official population. In the fieldwork, rigid quotas by sex and racial group were not used, but they were considered in terms of age groups for each province. For the treatment of data in this report, the percentage decimals referring to tables and graphs have been rounded to facilitate clarity, without affecting statistical accuracy.

PROFILE OF THOSE INTERVIEWED

45% women and 55% men were interviewed.

The interviewees identified themselves according to race in the following percentages:

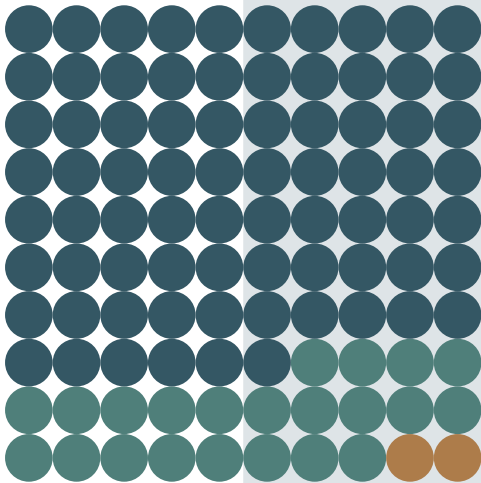
**27% black,
38% white,
and 35% mulattoes or other mixed races.**

The profile of the population according to age groups reflects the census data, with slightly more than 20% of young people (18-30 years old), around 57% between the ages of 30 and 60, and an increasing share (21%) of the older population aged 61+.

Of the people interviewed, 76% identify themselves as believers, whether practicing or not, constituting a majority compared to 22% who declare themselves atheists or agnostics.



DO YOU PROFESS OR PRACTICE ANY RELIGION?



BELIEVER
•76%

NON-BELIEVER
•22%

DOESN'T ANSWER
•2%

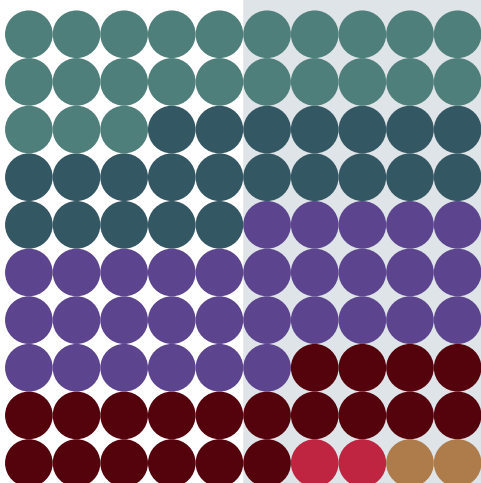


80%
WOMEN



74%
MEN

In terms of gender, a higher percentage of women identify as believers.



YES. I'M A BELIEVER, BUT I DON'T PRACTICE
•23%

YES. I'M A BELIEVER AND PRACTICE FROM TIME TO TIME
•22%

YES. I'M A BELIEVER AND PRACTICE FREQUENTLY
•31%

NO. I'M AN ATHEIST
•20%

NO. I'M AGNOSTIC
•2%

I PREFER NOT TO ANSWER
•2%

Belief in religious practices and non-belief show a uniform distribution across different age ranges, racial groups, and educational backgrounds.

Similarly, there are no major differences in the frequency of religious practice, except for a slightly higher percentage of women (35%) and the age group of 61 to 70 years (34%) among the 31% of the total sample who practice very frequently.

1. GENERAL PERCEPTION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



Have you or someone you know who professes a religion been harassed, repressed, threatened or obstructed in their daily life for reasons related to their faith?



68%

Of those interviewed, 68% acknowledge that they or someone they know who professes a religion has experienced varying degrees of harassment, repression, threats, or obstruction in practicing their faith.

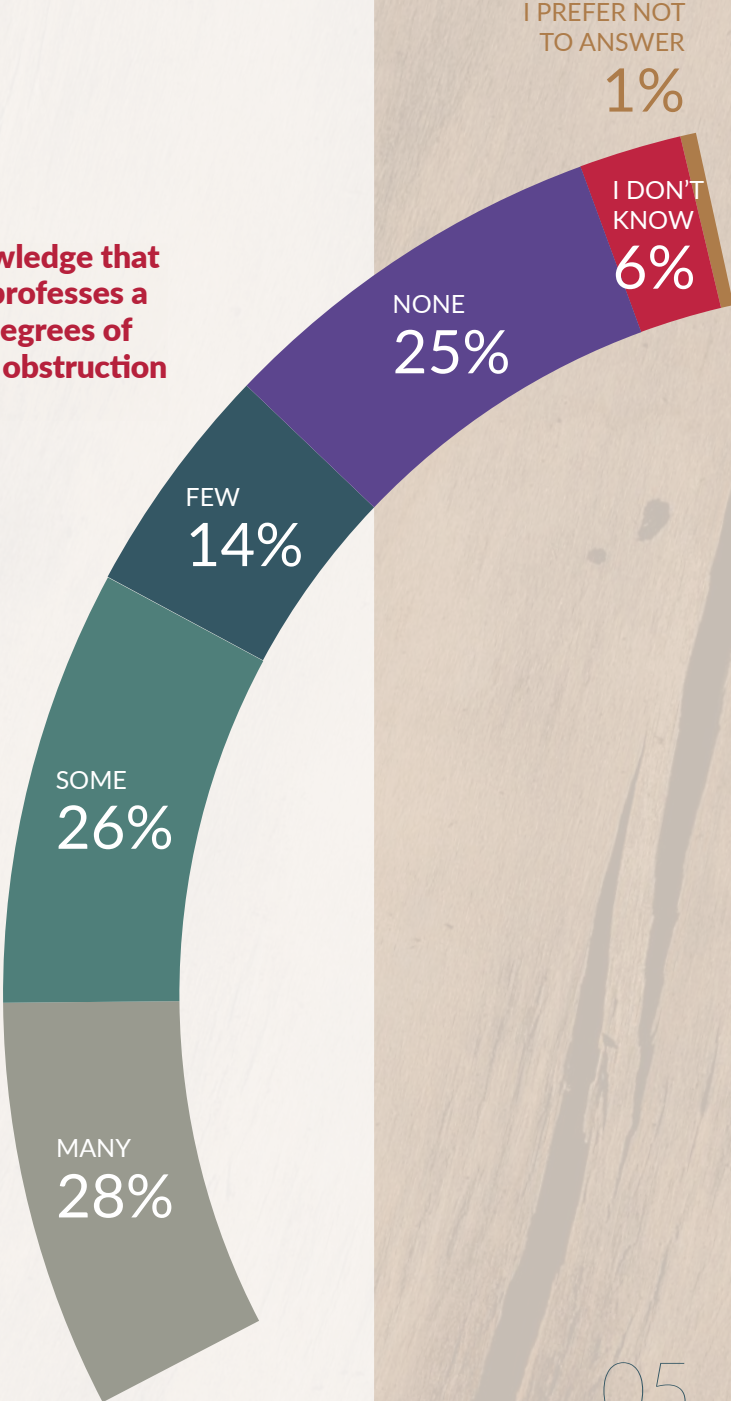
More than half (54%) know “many” or “some” people affected by this situation.



64%

Among believers this percentage significantly rises to 64%.

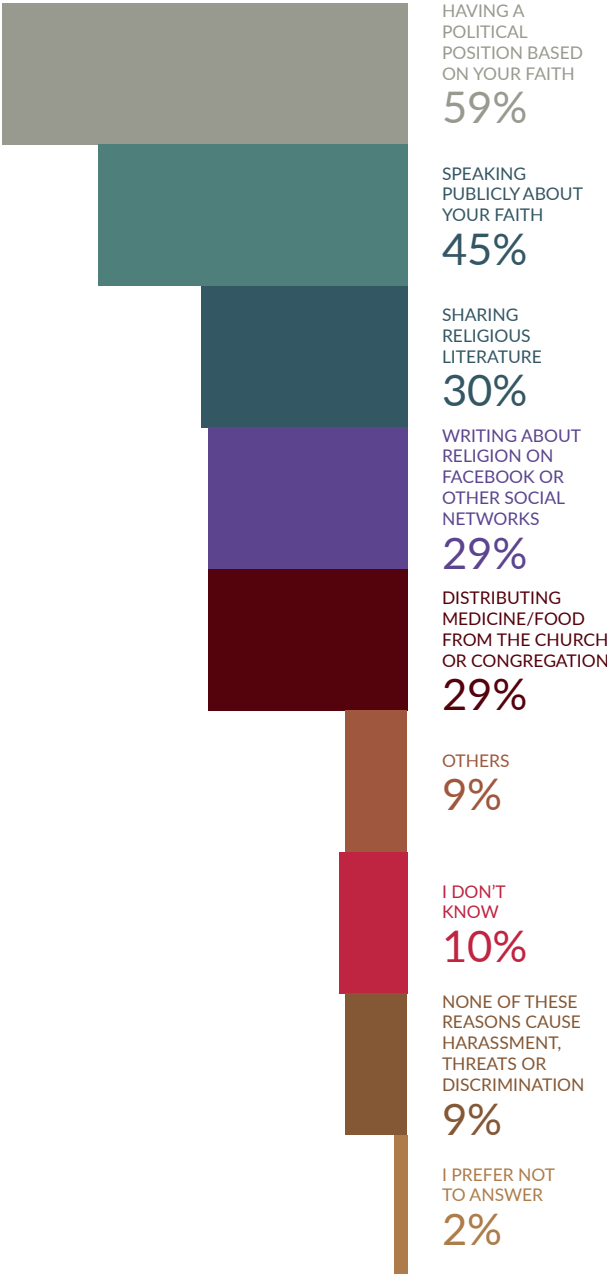
Among non-believers, the response of “many” and “some” drops to 23%, with the most frequent answer being that they do not know anyone (46%).



2. DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION IN SOCIAL, CIVIC AND POLITICAL SPHERES



As far as you know, **what are the causes of religiously motivated harassment, threats, or discrimination against believers?**
 (Maximum of two choices)



The prevailing opinion attributes two primary **causes for believers suffering harassment, threats, or discrimination:**

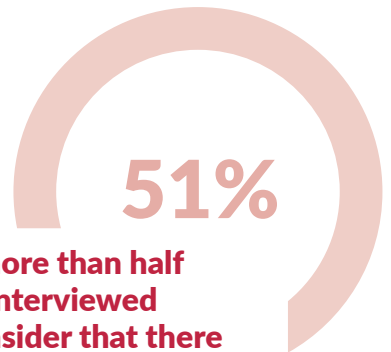
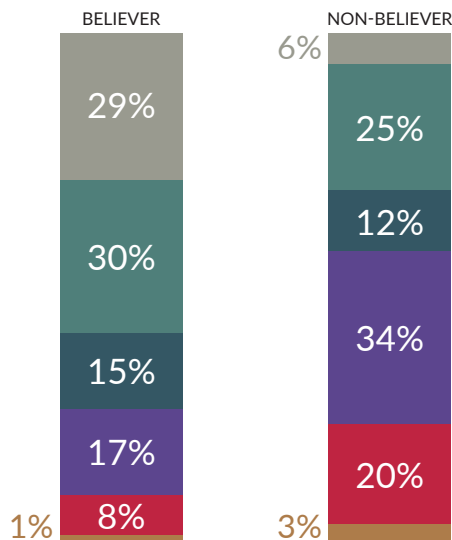
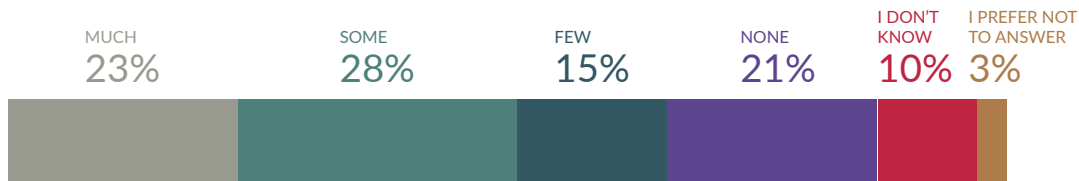
- 59%** “Having a political position based on their faith”.
- 45%** “Speaking publicly about their faith”.

Both answers reflect the authorities’ attempts **to confine the expression of religion to a restricted private setting.**

Protestants and Evangelicals (20% of the sample) emphasized “sharing religious literature” (45%) as reason for discrimination or harassment. Forty four percent of Jehovah’s Witnesses (11% of the sample) responded similarly. Jehovah’s Witnesses also highlighted “speaking publicly” and “on social networks” about their faith as reasons for harassment (61% and 43%, respectively).



To your knowledge, **have religious people been discriminated against in public or private employment for reasons related to faith?**



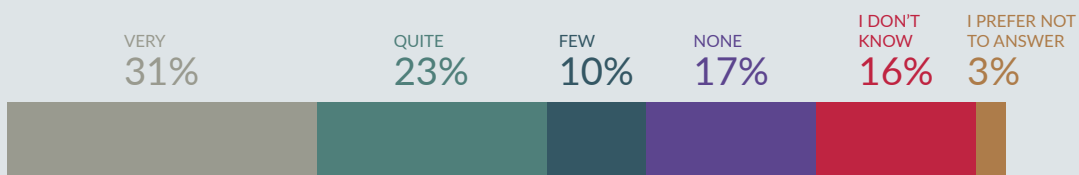
Slightly more than half of those interviewed (51%) consider that there is “much” or “some” discrimination against religious people in public or private employment.

These opinions are more prevalent among those who declare themselves believers and are less common among non-believers.



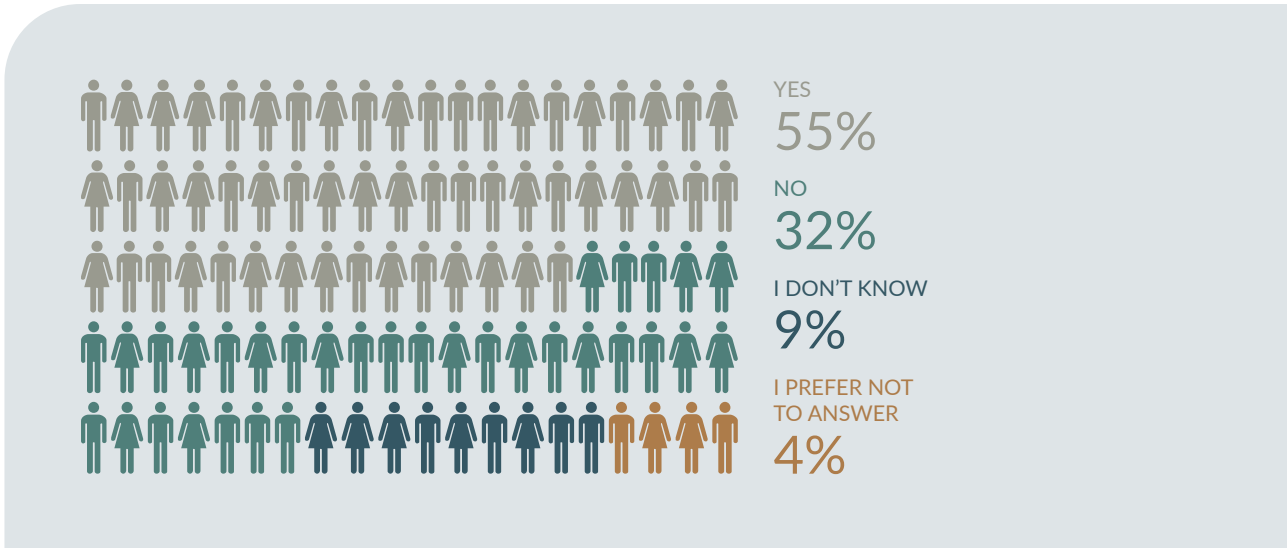
To the best of your knowledge, **has the functioning of civil society organizations been hindered, such as denial of permits, due to their religious beliefs and/or religious practices?**

A majority of interviewees (54%) said the functioning of civil society organizations have been ‘very’ or ‘quite’ frequently hindered due to their religious beliefs or practices. Specifically, among believers, the prevailing response is “very” at 37%, whereas among non-believers is at 14%.





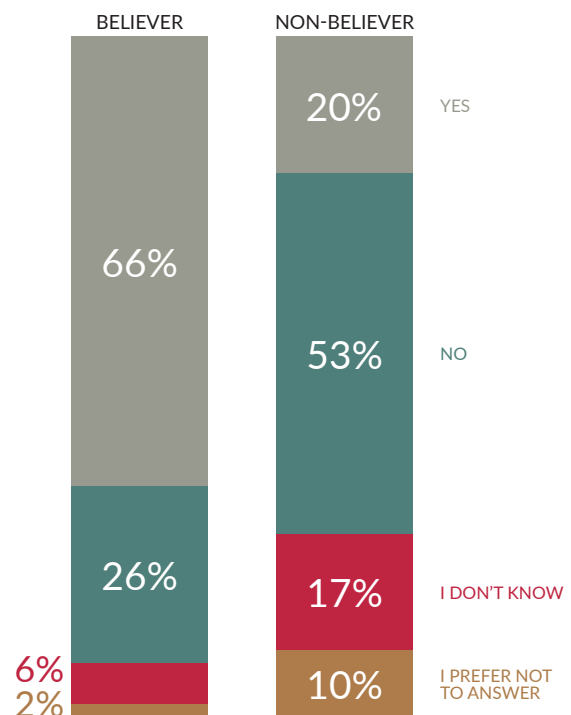
Do you know of any religious organization or religious leader whose work has been hindered or made difficult?



The majority of interviewees (55%) know a religious leader or group whose work was prevented or faced difficulties.

The percentage is much higher among believers (66%) and lower among non-believers (20%).

In fact, among those who practice their religious faith (occasionally or frequently), the highest proportion (77%) confirm such experiences.





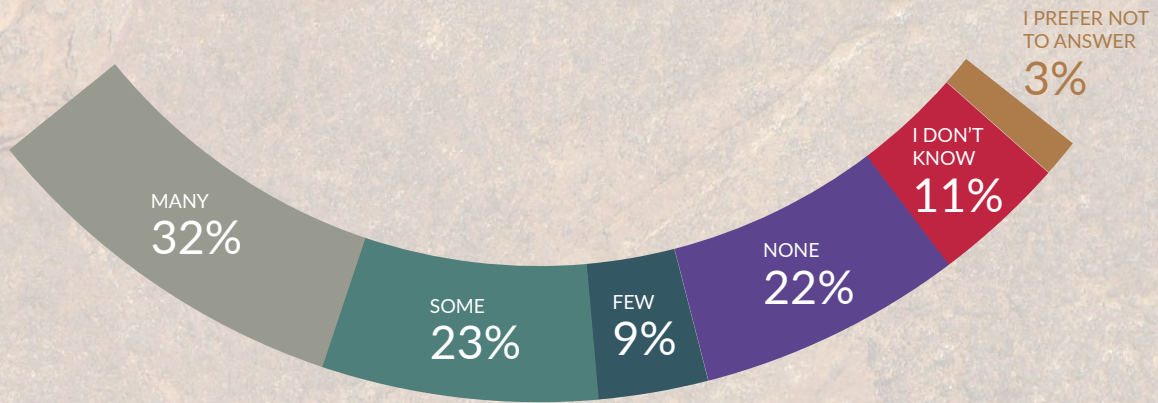
What have these difficulties or impediments been in your experience?

Deny permits for events in public spaces	64%
Deny or set conditions on granting permits to build or repair temples	63%
Deny or set conditions on granting permits for processions	63%
Deny or set conditions on granting permits for worship	62%
Prevent travel abroad	56%
Deny or set conditions to receive visits from foreign religious groups	50%
Hindering social and charitable work	50%
Deny or set conditions for the entry or collaboration of foreign missionaries	48%
Deny access to the media	47%
Prevent or set conditions on religious work in prisons	46%
Prevent or set conditions on religious work in hospitals	37%
Deny or make it difficult to train their own leaders and members	36%
Deny or hinder educational work or training in values	35%
Deny or hinder the use of information and communication technologies	30%
Deny or hinder access to the internet and telephony	28%
Other	9%
I prefer not to answer / I don't know	2%

“Deny permits for events in public spaces” (59%) and “Deny or set conditions on granting permits for worship” (57%) are the instances that Catholics (21% of the sample) report as happening most frequently. “Deny or set conditions on granting permits to build or repair temples” (70%) is the most reported issue for Protestants, something that they concur with Jehovah’s Witnesses (74%) and Afro-Cuban religions (75%), who also complain about cases of “Deny[ing] or set[ting] conditions on granting permits for worship” (70%).

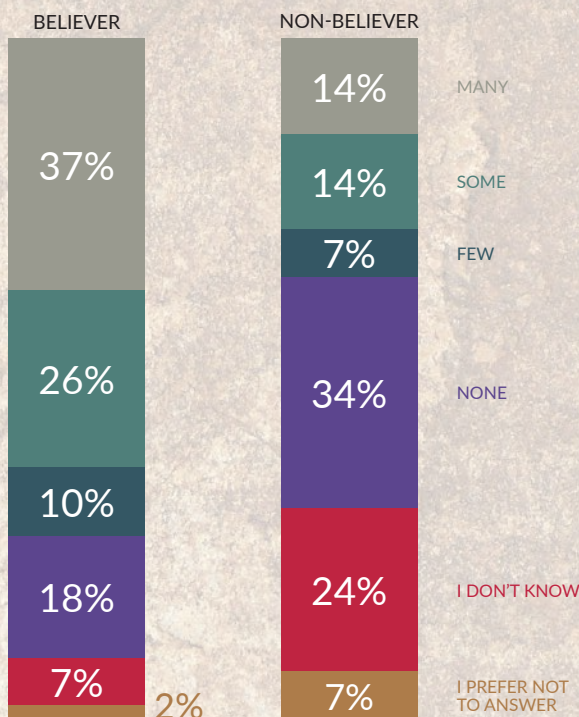


To the best of your knowledge, have religious leaders or their relatives been particular targets of repression for reasons related to faith?



55%

The majority of those interviewed (55%) indicate that they are aware of “many” or “some” cases in which religious leaders or their relatives have experienced some form of harassment or repression.



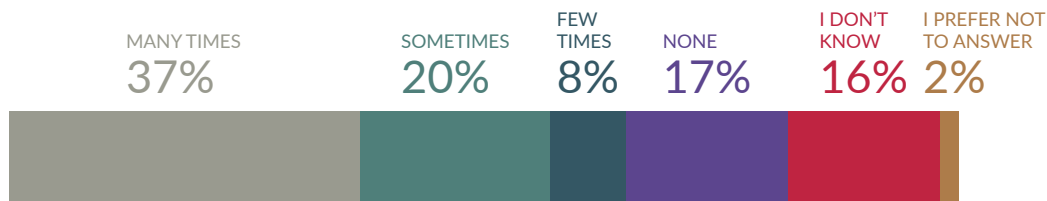
37%

The percentage of those reporting “many” is higher among believers (37%) particularly among Protestants and Evangelicals (53%) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (59%) when extrapolating by confession. On the other hand, individuals associated with the Catholic Church (21%) and Afro-Cuban (18%) religion tend to express fewer complaints about this type of situation.

3. MEASURES TARGETING RELIGION



As far as you know, **have people who profess a religion been monitored by the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution?** This includes reporting to the police, being watched, phone lines, etc.



Surveillance or monitoring is reported by 65% of respondents; 37% indicating that it occurs “many times” and 20% consider it to happen “sometimes”. There is also a greater level of awareness about the issue among believers, although somewhat less pronounced among Catholics and believers of Afro-Cuban religions.

THE OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS AND RELIGIOUS RIGHTS



Do you know the role of the Office of Religious Affairs?

A greater percentage of respondents who declare themselves believers, specifically those who practice frequently, are aware of the role of the Office of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the PCC. The proportion of believers who are aware increases from 42% among believers generally to 58% among believers who practice their faith frequently.

Protestants and Evangelicals have the highest incidence of knowledge of the role of this office (56%) compared to other groups, followed by Catholics (41%) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (47%).

However, awareness among believers of Afro-Cuban religions is significantly lower (32%).

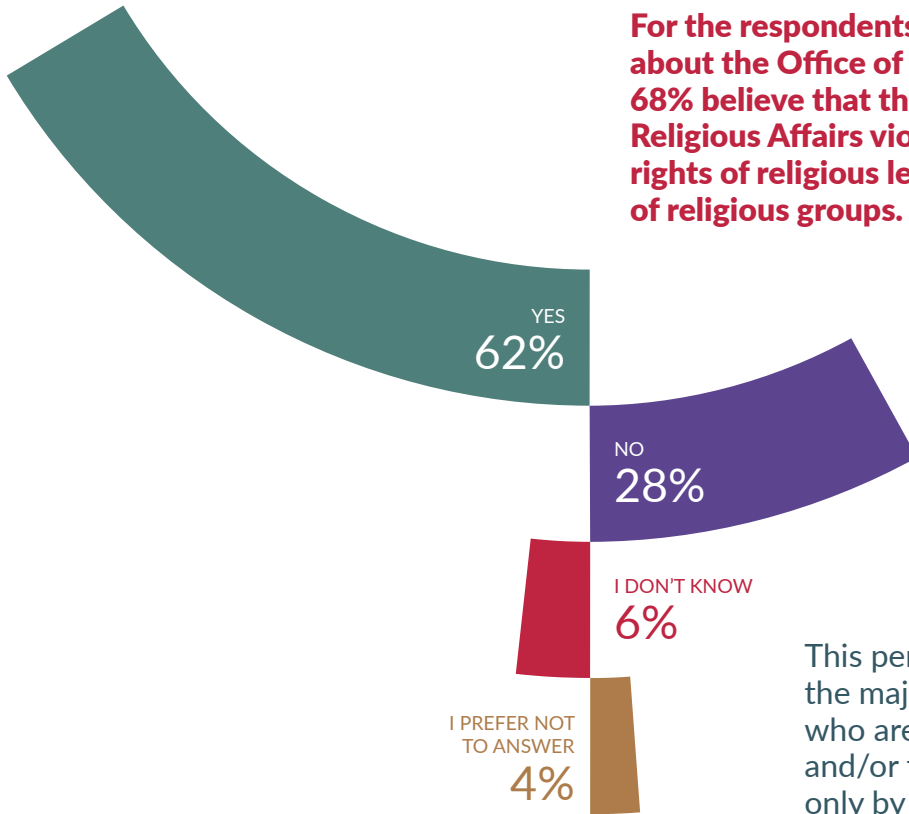




Do you believe that the Office of Religious Affairs of Cuba violates or represses the rights of religious leaders...?



For the respondents who are aware about the Office of Religious Affairs, 68% believe that the role of the Office of Religious Affairs violates or represses the rights of religious leaders and members of religious groups.



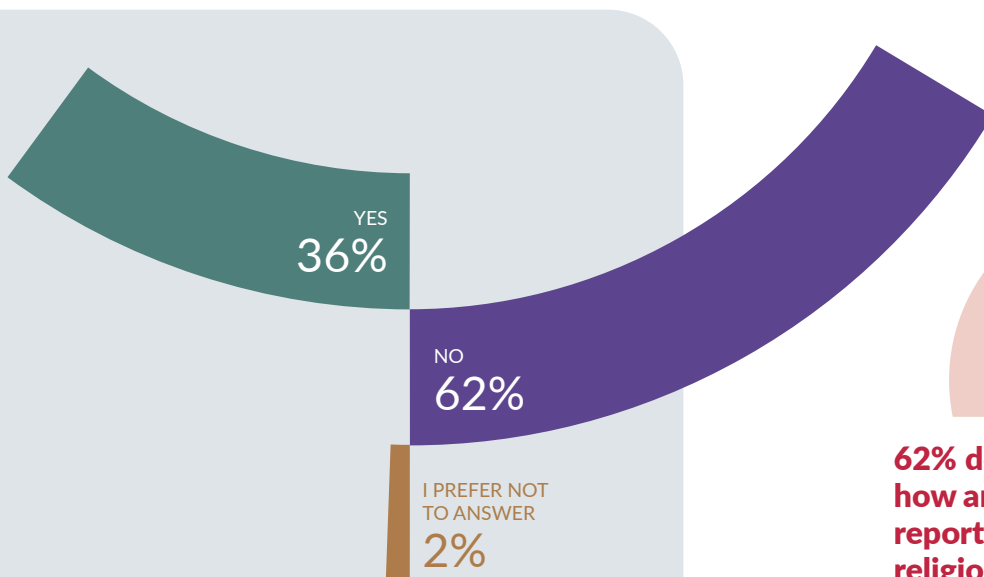
This perspective is shared by the majority of the people who are aware of its existence and/or functions (62%), but only by 18% of non-believers.



Do you know how and to whom you may report a violation against the practice of faith and/or religion?



62% do not know how and to whom to report a violation of religious practice.



4. OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE COUNTRY'S SITUATION AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST



Which are the institutions you trust the most?
(Up to two responses permitted)

"Religious institutions"	42%
Independent groups (human rights groups)	19%
Independent media	16%
Government	13%
The communist party	8%
The Fraternities/ Freemasonry Centers	5%
State controlled media	3%
The mass organizations (CDR, FMC, etc.)	2%
The courts	2%
The police	2%
The army	1%
I prefer not to answer	21%

Religious institutions are the most trusted institution, followed by "independent groups (human rights)", "the independent media", and the "government".

Respondents have less trust in certain institutions, all with percentages of 2% or less, namely the mass organizations such as the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (Comités de Defensa de la Revolución, CDR), The Federation of Cuban Women (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas, FMC), the courts, the police, and the army.

There are no differences found in the answers when distinguishing by age groups, between men and women, or by racial groups.

WHERE IS THE COUNTRY HEADED?

Do you think things in the country are going in the right direction or have they gone in the wrong direction?



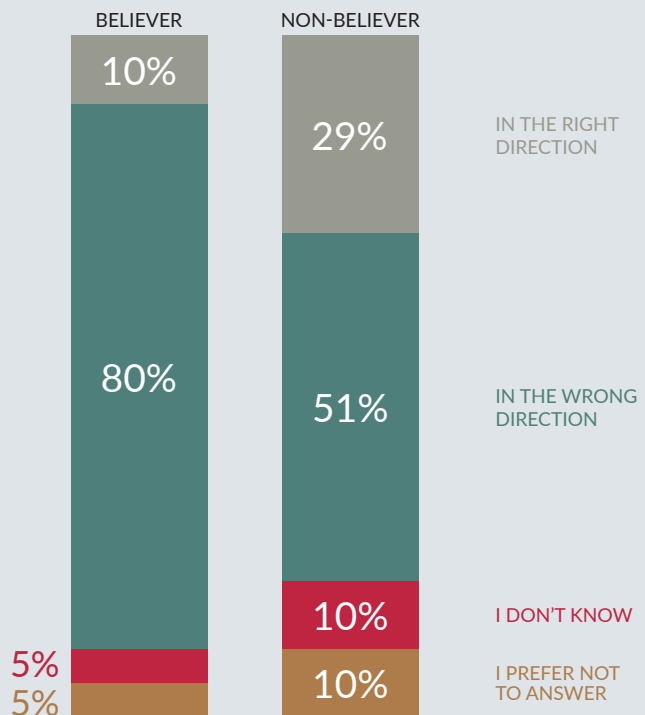
73%

The vast majority of respondents say the country is going in the wrong direction (73%).

When distinguishing by age, race, or education background, there is homogeneity among all social groups.

Believers are the most critical of the country's direction, with the percentage rising to 80%.

80%



CONCLUSIONS

This report shows the perceived lack of respect and guarantee for religious freedom or belief in Cuba. The Cuban regime persists in employing surveillance and control systems to restrict or persecute any public expression, especially political, by individuals who uphold civic commitments aligned with their faith-based values. Furthermore, respondents report that the actions and social influence of religious entities or congregations are restricted.

For instance, 68% of the individuals interviewed acknowledge that they know someone who professes a religion and has been harassed, repressed, threatened, or interfered with their daily life due to reasons related to their faith. More than half of interviewees declare that religious leaders or groups have been frequently prevented from carrying out their work. This is done by denying or imposing conditions to issue permits, especially for activities involving believers or specific sectors of the population such as the construction or repair of temples, worship, processions, or other events in public spaces.

The Office of Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party plays a fundamental role in the violation or limitation of these rights. As indicated, 68% of believers in this study consider that this Office violates or represses the rights of religious leaders and other members of religious groups.

The survey's findings align with the continuous reports from the **Cuban Observatory of Human Rights (OCDH)** and other organizations which highlight specific cases and denouncements of repression. This extends beyond private lives and emphasizes the importance of exercising these rights in public spaces.

Upholding freedom of religion or belief is a vital element of human rights. Consequently, churches and their followers possess the potential to offer valuable solutions to address the profound systemic crisis prevailing in Cuba. In particular, they can make a pivotal contribution to shaping Cuba's future by leveraging their charitable, educational, and civic expertise.

