

Practice Update

Cuba Practice Update

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By [Pedro A. Freyre](#) and [Matthew D. Aho](#)
New National Poll Shows Broad Support for Overhaul of Cuba Policy

Akerman's [Pedro A. Freyre](#) and [Matthew D. Aho](#) yesterday authored an opinion piece for the Washington D.C.-based Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center on the results of a poll measuring Americans' attitudes on U.S.–Cuba relations. In it, they argue that the survey, commissioned by the Atlantic Council, can be interpreted in only one way: the tide of U.S. public opinion has turned away from isolation and toward engagement and normalization. The poll stands out in several ways. For the first time ever, a major U.S. public policy institution commissioned a bipartisan survey exclusively dedicated to Cuba. The survey probed for respondents' views on specific policy changes that are currently under consideration, such as further easing of travel restrictions. The results represent the attitudes and perspectives of Americans of all ethnic backgrounds across all 50 states. The numbers are as striking as they are definitive. Nationally, the poll found that 56 percent of Americans support normalizing relations or engaging more directly with Cuba. In the traditionally hardline anti-Castro haven of Florida and among the U.S. Hispanic community, support for normalization was 63 percent and 62 percent, respectively. Across the board—regardless of age, gender, income, geography, or party affiliation—a majority of Americans believe that the United States

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should abandon its decades-old policy of isolation in favor of normalized, pragmatic relations with Cuba that are consistent with U.S. national interests. The poll also revealed that Fidel and Raúl Castro remain as widely unpopular figures. And despite U.S. ties with other controversial regions like Russia, Venezuela, and Syria, a large majority of Americans are able to remove their personal biases against foreign leaders like Vladimir Putin, the late Hugo Chávez, and Bashar al-Assad when it comes to agreeing with U.S. foreign policy.

Whether this poll will affect policy decisions at the White House remains unclear. President Obama has authority to further expand categories of licensed travel to Cuba and other forms of engagement. If he wants to go further, he can come out in support of a bill to restore freedom to travel for all Americans. In doing so, he would join a growing chorus of voices, such as Florida's Charlie Crist, who just last week came out boldly in favor of normalization.

2014 has real potential to be a tipping point in U.S. relations with Cuba, but it will require resolute action by the president. There are fierce and vocal opponents of a sensible approach on Cuba, and they will not shy away from a fight. But what the poll strongly suggests—in cold, hard numbers—is that a sizeable majority of Americans of all backgrounds would support the president should he choose to act.

Pedro A. Freyre, chair of Akerman's International Practice, has previously been interviewed by CNN Latino on the growth of so-called "people-to-people" cultural exchanges, which allow Americans to visit Cuba through travel providers that offer full-time itineraries featuring meaningful interactions with the Cuban people. Regarded as a longtime Cuba expert, Freyre appears on CNN's newly launched prime time Spanish talk show "Maria Elvira" as a weekly commentator on U.S.-Cuba relations. Each Tuesday at 8:00 pm EST, Freyre talks with well-known TV news anchor Maria Elvira Salazar to help viewers understand recent changes taking place on the island, as well as U.S. policy developments coming out of Washington D.C. He recently provided a one-hour comprehensive analysis of the U.S.

Embargo on Cuba. In a separate program, he provided analysis of the Atlantic Council's new Cuba poll, arguing that the tide has turned in U.S. public opinion of Cuba policy. He also touched on recent public comments in support of limited business engagement with Cuba by Cuban American sugar tycoon Alfonso "Alfy" Fanjul. In addition, Freyre teaches a seminar at the Columbia Law School titled "Cuba Law, Policy, and Transition."

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