

ECONOMIC FACTORS

- Too dependent on one crop – sugar. It was known as the ‘sugar bowl’ of the world.
- The US was the main purchaser of Cuban sugar and offered a higher price than the global market, in return US goods were dominant in the Cuban market
- Unemployment periodically high: 8% during sugar harvest, 30% rest of the year.
- Cuba was dependent on sale of sugar to be able to purchase key commodities such as oil
- No unemployment benefits
- Wealth, ownership of land and sugar mills, was in the hands of a small elite
- From 1952 the economy took a downturn. As the price of sugar dropped internationally good became much more expensive to buy in Cuba. However, Cuba could not develop industry and diversify the economy due to its agreements with the US.
- Inflation and unemployment grew to 17% in the 1950s
- The middle classes and wealthy elites were becoming disillusioned with the regime. Their savings were negatively impacted by inflation and their business profits suffered from the economic downturn.

FOREIGN INFLUENCE

- With support from US Cuba became independent from Spain after the Spanish-American War 1898. Cuba was under US military occupation for 5 years.
- Cuban independence was declared in 1902
- The Platt Amendment which was added to the Cuban constitution gave the US the right to intervene in Cuba’s foreign affairs and in its economy. The US used the amendment to justify intervention in Cuba to protect its economic interests. It was finally abolished in 1936.
- Long term resentment towards US influence
- US owned ½ the land
- US companies had significant interests in all Cuban industries including sugar and tobacco
- 3/5 of railways owned by US
- All electrical products owned by US
- Entire telephone system owned by US
- US was main market for Cuban exports
- US ambassador in Havana referred to as 2nd most important man in Cuba

SOCIAL TENSION

- Poor and limited housing
- Lack of access to healthcare
- Lack of access to education. Literacy rates were under 50% in rural areas.
- Rural areas lacked electricity and clean water

POLITICAL ISSUES

- No effective democratic system
- General Batista had seized power in 1933 and had ruled as a military dictator. Batista initially put in place a ‘puppet’ president but made himself president in 1940. He ruled Cuba until 1944.
- Between 1944 and 1952 a limited democracy developed, however there was widespread corruption. Batista returned as President in March 1952 taking power in a coup; he suspended the constitution and ruled as a dictator.
- Historian Hugh Thomas suggests that Batista’s lack of reforms was a key cause of civil war as he ‘spent a lot of time dealing with his private affairs and his foreign fortunes leaving himself too little time for affairs of state’.
- Cuban political parties did not seem to offer an alternative to Batista’s regime.
- The two main parties were the Authentic Party [PA] and the Orthodox Party [PO]. There was also the Popular Socialist Party [PSP].
- Fidel Castro was a charismatic member of the Orthodox Party and planned to stand for a seat in Congress in the elections of 1952. However, the elections did not take place due to Batista’s coup.
- No prospect of legal political change, Castro, a middle class lawyer and more a liberal nationalist than a communist, attempted to overthrow the regime in 1953.