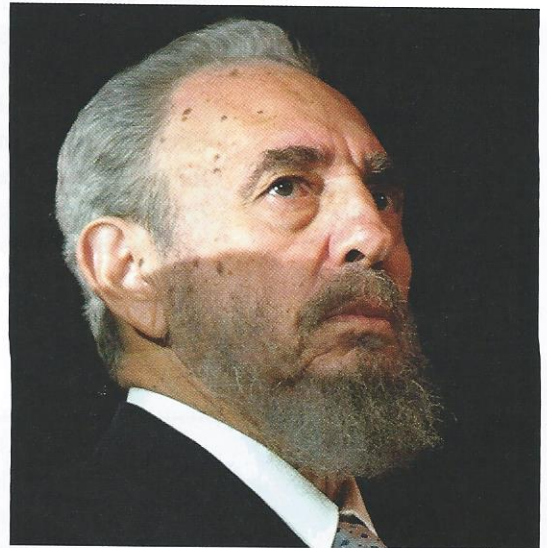


Cuba is one of the few countries in the world that remains communist in its ideology. Ever since 1959, historians have tried to explain the reasons why Fidel Castro was able to rise and maintain himself in power for so long, in spite of often adverse domestic and international circumstances.

A Spanish colony until 1898, and a republic strongly linked to the USA after its independence in 1902, Cuba did not seem to offer the conditions for a successful communist revolution. Other countries in the region suffered deeper political, social and economic problems. Yet events between 1953 and 1959 contributed to the rise of Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement.

This chapter deals with the rise to power and the rule of Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz (b. 1926) in Cuba. It focuses on the conditions against which he came to power, addresses the methods used in his rise and analyzes domestic policies up to 2000.



Fidel Castro

Timeline – 1926–2008

- 1926** Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz is born in Biran, south-eastern Cuba.
- 1933** President Gerardo Machado is overthrown by the head of the army, Fulgencio Batista.
- 1934–44** Fulgencio Batista controls the country through puppet governments.
- 1934** The Platt Amendment is abolished. USA retains a naval base in Guantánamo Bay and trade agreements between the nations remain in place.
- 1940** Batista becomes President. A new constitution is adopted.
- 1944–48** Partido Auténtico (Authentic Party) leader, Ramón Grau San Martín, becomes President.
- 1948–52** Authentic Party leader Carlos Prío Socarrás rules Cuba.
- 1952** Batista seizes power in a coup against Prío Socarrás.
- 1953** Castro leads the Moncada assault against a military garrison. He is sentenced to 15 years in prison.
- 1955** Castro is granted amnesty and leaves Cuba.
- 1956** Castro returns from Mexico, leading the *Granma* expedition. He launches a military campaign against Batista in the **Sierra Maestra** mountains.
- 1958** USA withdraws assistance to President Batista. Batista's final offensive against the rebels ends in failure.
- 1959** Batista flees the country. Castro's troops enter Havana and a provisional government is set up. Fidel Castro becomes Prime Minister in February. Expropriation and nationalization of businesses begins.
- 1960** Castro nationalizes foreign companies. USA abolishes Cuban sugar quota and begins an economic blockade. Castro establishes diplomatic and commercial relations with the Soviet Union.
- 1961** The Bay of Pigs invasion is repelled. USA breaks diplomatic ties with Cuba, and Castro announces the socialist character of the revolution.
- 1962** Cuban Missile Crisis. USA imposes a trade embargo on Cuba.
- 1963** Castro makes his first visit to the Soviet Union.



ToK Time

At the time of writing this book, Fidel Castro had transferred power to his brother Raúl, but has continued to be a leading voice in Cuban affairs. What, if anything, do you know about Fidel Castro? Can you find any recent information in the newspapers about Cuba? To what extent do you think your previous knowledge and opinions of Castro and Cuba can influence your study of this chapter?



Sierra Maestra

Mountain range in the south-east of Cuba, in the Oriente province.

● **Examiner's hint**

Exam questions on Paper 2 will either ask about the rise or consolidation of power of single-party or authoritarian leaders. Some questions may mention Castro specifically, while others may ask you to answer with reference to one or more leaders of your choice (these are referred to as open questions). If you are planning to answer an open question, don't only choose Castro on the grounds of how much you know about him; make sure Castro is an appropriate example for the specific question asked.

- 1967** Ernesto 'Che' Guevara is killed in Bolivia.
- 1968** Castro announces the Revolutionary Offensive.
- 1970** The 'Ten Million Zafra' programme fails to achieve its target.
- 1976** Under a new constitution, Castro assumes the title of President of the State Council, and becomes head of state, head of government, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.
- 1980** Massive Cuban emigration of approximately 125,000 people to the USA from the Mariel port.
- 1991** Cuba begins 'Special Period in Times of Peace' programme following the end of Soviet aid to Cuba.
- 1995** Castro visits China for the first time.
- 1998** Castro welcomes Pope John Paul II in the pontiff's historic visit to Cuba.
- 2006** Castro announces a temporary transfer of power to his brother, Raúl Castro.
- 2008** Castro resigns as President.

Figure 3.1
Map of Cuba.



Section I:

Origins and nature of authoritarian and single-party states – Cuba

No doubt Fidel Castro played a large part in the success of the Cuban revolution in 1959, and in retaining power for almost 50 years. It is also true, however, that particular historical conditions created the background against which Castro became an appealing option to many and an indisputable force to others.

This section aims at analyzing the contributions of Fidel Castro to the success of the Cuban revolution in January 1959, as well as the part played by the historical, political and economic circumstances against which he rose to power.

Background

Cuban independence

After many years of struggle, and with the aid of the USA, Cuba shook off Spanish rule in what became known as the Spanish–American War (1898). The Treaty of Paris (1898) between Spain and the USA granted the territories of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines to the USA in exchange for money. Spain also lost sovereignty over Cuba, which was placed under military occupation by the USA for five years. In 1902, the Republic of Cuba was declared. Yet Cuba was not fully sovereign. By the Platt Amendment annexed to the Cuban constitution, the USA kept the right to intervene in Cuba's finances and foreign relations. The Platt Amendment not only aimed at preventing the influence of third-party countries in Cuba, but also at guaranteeing US control of Cuban affairs. In the following years, until its abolition in 1934, the Platt Amendment was used on several occasions by the USA to intervene in Cuban internal affairs and protect US economic interests on the island.

Economic and social aspects

The USA's interests in Cuba were protected by policies that benefited American investments in the island. US capital played an important part in the exploitation of Cuban national resources. Known as 'the sugar bowl of the world', Cuba was a **monoculture economy**. Although it also produced tobacco, coffee and rice, it was the production of sugar that provided the most important income for the republic. Washington bought a significant percentage of Cuban sugar production at prices higher than those set by the international market. In exchange, Cuba was to give preferential access to American products. Cuba was not an industrialized nation and depended on the revenues from exported sugar to buy the necessary manufactured goods and oil. The development of Cuban service and utility industries, such as gas, electricity, communications, railways and the banking system, relied upon large amounts of US investment. Although there were economic advantages for Cuba in these agreements, they also meant that the Cuban economy was tied to the USA. If Washington decided to reduce the quantity of sugar bought from Cuba, the economy of the island would be seriously affected.

Cubans enjoyed a better standard of living than workers in other regions of the continent, but there were many social and economic problems that affected them. The living conditions for workers were precarious. Wages were low, housing was limited and access to health and education not available to all. Few rural areas possessed running water or electricity. Illiteracy was widespread, reaching 50 per cent in certain parts of the countryside. Sugar workers were seasonal; this meant there were months when they did not have steady employment. The ownership of land and of the sugar mills was largely concentrated in the hands of the upper class and foreign companies.



Monoculture economy

The agricultural practice of producing or growing one single crop over a wide area.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

RESEARCH ACTIVITY

To understand the social and economic situations against which Castro rose to power, it is important that you are familiar with the role played by foreign companies as well as with the importance of sugar to the Cuban economy.

In groups, find information about some of the different foreign companies operating in Cuba before the revolution. Assess their impact on the Cuban economy and society. Research the importance of sugar before the revolution and the reasons why it began to lose economic value throughout the 20th century.



Fulgencio Batista

Political aspects

Between independence and revolution, Cuba was led by a series of governments that showed high levels of corruption and limited success in solving economic problems and social inequality. By 1934, the armed forces under the command of General Fulgencio Batista controlled the nation by the appointment of puppet Presidents. In 1940, Batista himself became President of Cuba and ruled until 1944.

Between 1944 and 1952 there was a return to democracy, but corruption continued to dominate every branch of the government, while Cuba faced inflation and unemployment. On 10 March 1952, Batista returned to the political stage and overthrew President Carlos Prío Socarrás. He suspended the constitution to rule as a dictator.

The rule of Fulgencio Batista (1952–59)

During Batista's period as President, political corruption continued to reign, and at shocking levels. As economic problems worsened, social and political unrest developed. Batista moved from making concessions to using repression to maintain control of the country.

One of the reasons why the Cuban economy worsened was the decline in sugar prices on the international sugar market. As the price of sugar dropped, Cuba found it more expensive to purchase the goods it did not produce at home. This situation is known as the 'deterioration of the **terms of trade**'. However, because of its international obligations with the USA, Cuba could not successfully develop an industry to substitute its imports, a measure many Latin American countries had taken by the end of World War II (see previous chapter). The rise in the cost of imports led to shortages and inflation. Furthermore, the rise in the price of oil affected transportation and the operation of sugar mills, increasing unemployment to an alarming 17 per cent during the late 1950s, to be combined with a 13 per cent level of underemployment and low wages for those who were employed.

Under these circumstances, opposition to Batista's dictatorship intensified. The rural workers, poorly housed and under-educated, did not support the regime. Urban workers were affected by the economic problems of inflation and unemployment, and student unions demanded freedom and democracy. The higher social classes, who were losing their purchasing power and whose businesses were being affected by the atmosphere of economic uncertainty, were another source of opposition to Batista. Opposition, however, was not organized and had not yet found a leading figure.

The rise of opposition to Batista

One of the factors that contributed to the rise of Castro was the fact that the Cuban political parties did not seem to offer a genuine alternative to the existing order. The Authentic Party and the Orthodox Party were two main political parties in Cuba before the revolution. The communists were represented by the PSP, the Popular Socialist Party.

Partido Auténtico (full name: Partido Revolucionario Cubano or Cuban Revolutionary Party)

Founded in 1934, this party's platform had socialist and nationalist elements. It defended the rights of workers to be represented by trade unions. Nationalism was expressed in its motto 'Cuba for the Cubans'. However, Presidents Ramón Grau San Martín (1944–48) and

Terms of trade

Relationship between the prices at which a country sells its exports and the prices paid for its imports.

Carlos Prío Socarrás (1948–52) were Authentic Party leaders who ruled during one of the most corrupt and undemocratic periods in Cuban history.

Partido Ortodoxo (full name: Partido del Pueblo Cubano or Cuban People's Party)

Born from a split of the Authentic Party, this party was founded in 1948 by Eduardo Chibás, who coined the party's motto 'Integrity against Money'. It played an important role in the denunciation of the corruption in Cuban politics. Its aims were to end government corruption and to nationalize US-owned companies. Orthodox leader Chibás was considered to be a solid presidential candidate, but he committed suicide in 1951. Fidel Castro was a member of the party until he formed his own organization, the 26th of July Movement.

The Partido Socialista Popular (PSP; Popular Socialist Party)

The PSP was Cuba's communist party. Founded in 1925, it suffered persecution and was banned from participating in elections several times. In 1953, Batista banned the PSP again.

SOURCE A

The Auténtico and Ortodoxo parties proved incapable of responding effectively to Batista's seizure of power. The Orthodox were leaderless and the Auténticos could not lead. After 1952 Cuba's two principal parties became irrelevant to a solution of the political crises. Both parties, to be sure, condemned the violation of the 1940 Constitution, but neither party responded to the army usurpation with either a comprehensive program or compelling plan of action.

From Louis Perez Jr., 'Cuba c. 1930–1959' in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *Cuba: A Short History*, 1993

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

QUESTION

Why, according to Source A, was opposition to Batista ineffective?

RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Find information on Eduardo Chibás' ideas and roles. Explain how and why he decided to end his life.

The greatest challenge for the government would not come from any of the more traditional Cuban parties. It would come instead from the rise of Fidel Castro as leader of a totally new movement.

Section II:

The Cuban Revolution and the rise of Fidel Castro

Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz was born in 1926 in the eastern province of Oriente. His father, an immigrant from Spanish Galicia, owned sugar plantations in the region. In 1945, Castro enrolled in law school in Havana and soon joined the Orthodox Party. He was an outstanding orator, who had an exceptional memory for everything he read and heard; he was also a fine athlete. All of these factors helped him gain popularity and support within the party. In 1952, Castro planned to run for a seat in Congress, but elections were never held, as

ToK Time

If you were to write a biography of Fidel Castro, what would you include? Would this choice be affected by the context in which you would be using the biography? In other words, is there a history of Castro the leader, one of Castro the student, another of Castro the family man or is everything relevant to understand the influence of a leader on historical events? Explain your answer fully.

When you need to find the biography of a historical character, where do you go? Do you go to Wikipedia? Evaluate the usefulness of the entry for Fidel Castro in Wikipedia. Is knowledge that is collectively produced in any sense 'better' than a biography written by one person? How much of one's knowledge depends on interaction with other knowers?



a result of Batista's coup against Prío Socarrás. From the very beginning Castro showed his opposition to the rule of Batista and in 1953 he tried to depose him for the first time. When analyzing the role played by Fidel Castro in the Cuban revolution, three stages must be taken into consideration:

- The attack against the Moncada Barracks (1953), which provided him with an opportunity to be known by fellow citizens and launch the 26th of July Movement.
- The landing of the *Granma* expedition (1956), which marked the beginning of the armed struggle at a national level.
- The campaign in the Sierra Maestra (1956–59), which ended with his Rebel Army's victorious entry into Havana city in January 1959.

The Moncada assault (1953) and the birth of the 26th of July Movement

On 26 July 1953, a group of approximately 140 men dressed in military uniforms attacked a military garrison in Cuba known as the Moncada Barracks. Most of them were members of the Partido Ortodoxo, and they were led by Fidel Castro, his brother Raúl and **Abel Santamaría**. Moncada is situated in Santiago de Cuba, in the Oriente province, and was chosen for several reasons. It was the second-largest military garrison in the country and had large supplies of ammunition that Castro hoped to seize. Also, Oriente was one of the regions with the greatest social unrest, which Castro thought would provide popular support for the attack. Moreover, the distance between Santiago de Cuba and Havana (see map on p.54) ensured that if Batista's troops were sent from the capital to defend the building, there would be enough time to complete the takeover. Finally, the timing of the attack coincided with a popular celebration in the streets of Santiago, so Castro hoped to find fewer soldiers in the garrison.

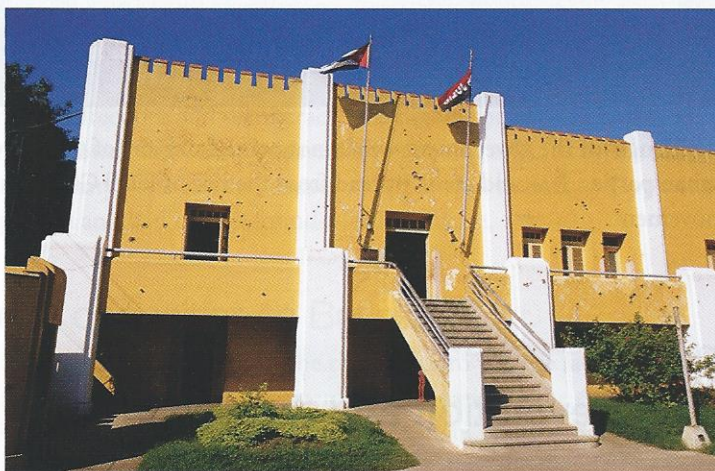
The aim of the operation was to obtain weapons that would help spark a general insurrection against Batista. Castro believed that if the attack was successful and his men acquired weapons, they would gather massive popular support for the uprising.

Abel Santamaría (1927–53)

A member of the Orthodox Party, Santamaría met Castro in 1952 and, like him, rejected Batista's coup. He was captured and tortured to death by Batista's forces after the Moncada raid.



Picture of the Moncada Barracks.



The attack had been carefully planned, but several last-minute problems complicated the work of the rebels. Although the surprise factor was intended to play in the rebels' favour, the army managed to defend the building successfully. Almost half of the rebels who participated in the attack were killed; many were captured and tortured to death, including Abel Santamaría. Fidel and Raúl Castro managed to escape, but were soon captured by Batista's forces and imprisoned.

Batista decided to make the trial of the rebels a great show of strength. He wanted Cubans to see how determined he was to crush any opposition to the regime, in the hope that it would work as a deterrent. Fidel Castro, a lawyer, decided to defend himself at the trial. Although Castro's own trial took place in a separate room and attendance was restricted, his speech **'History will absolve me'** became not only his defence, but a programme for the political and social reform of the country.

SOURCE A

There are two hundred thousand peasant families who do not have a single acre of land to cultivate to provide food for their starving children...

A revolutionary government with the backing of the people and the respect of the nation, after cleaning the various institutions of all venal and corrupt officials, would proceed immediately to industrialize the country, mobilizing all inactive capital, currently estimated at about 500 million dollars, through the National Bank and the Agricultural, Industrial and Development Bank, and submitting this mammoth task to experts and men of absolute competence, completely removed from all political machinations, for study, direction, planning and realization... A revolutionary government would solve the housing problem by cutting all rents in half; by providing tax exemptions on homes inhabited by the owners; by tripling taxes on rented homes; by tearing down hovels and replacing them with modern multiple-dwelling buildings; and by financing housing all over the island on a scale heretofore unheard of; with the criterion that, just as each rural family should possess its own tract of land, each city family should own its home or apartment... Finally, a revolutionary government would undertake the integral reform of the educational system, bringing it in line with the foregoing projects with the idea of educating those generations who will have the privilege of living in a happy land.

From Fidel Castro, 'History will absolve me', 1953



'History will absolve me' speech

When asked about the 'History will absolve me' speech, Castro claimed that he had written the speech while in prison waiting for his trial. He said that he had used lime juice to make it invisible to others and had inserted it between the lines of ordinary letters, so that it could be smuggled out of prison for printing and distribution in 1954.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

QUESTIONS

- How effective do you think the speech was in identifying Cuba's problems?
- Explain why you consider that 'History will absolve me', once printed and circulated among the Cubans, became an appealing speech.

Consequences of the Moncada assault

The Moncada assault marked the foundation of Castro's political movement, '26th of July', named after the day of the attack. The rebels became known as the 'Generation of the Centenary', as 1953 marked the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Cuban hero, **José Martí**.

Fidel Castro became the only political leader who not only complained about Batista's dictatorship, but who was also ready to do something about it. Although the rebels were the aggressors, Batista's excesses in repression, torture and persecution affected his image and allowed Castro and his men to emerge as martyrs of the dictatorship.

In 1954, in an attempt to legitimize his rule, Batista held elections and ran as presidential candidate. With Castro in prison, the PSP banned and no effective opposition to his candidature, Batista used the elections to claim that he had been rightfully chosen by the people. The following year, among some other concessions made to appear democratic, Batista allowed political parties to regroup and released many political prisoners, including



José Martí (1853–95)

Known as 'The Apostle', Martí is a hero of the War of Independence. His political writings had a large influence on Cuban politicians, including Fidel Castro. He died in combat in 1895, becoming a martyr of the independence struggle.



Fidel Castro and other prisoners leave prison after Batista's amnesty.

Guerrillas

An irregular military force fighting small-scale, fast-moving actions against conventional military and police forces. Guerrilla tactics involve constantly shifting points of attack, sabotage, and terrorism. The strategy of the guerrilla is to wear down the enemy until he can be defeated in conventional battle or sues for peace. (The word 'guerrilla' means 'little/ small war' in Spanish.)

Rebels disembarking from *Granma*.

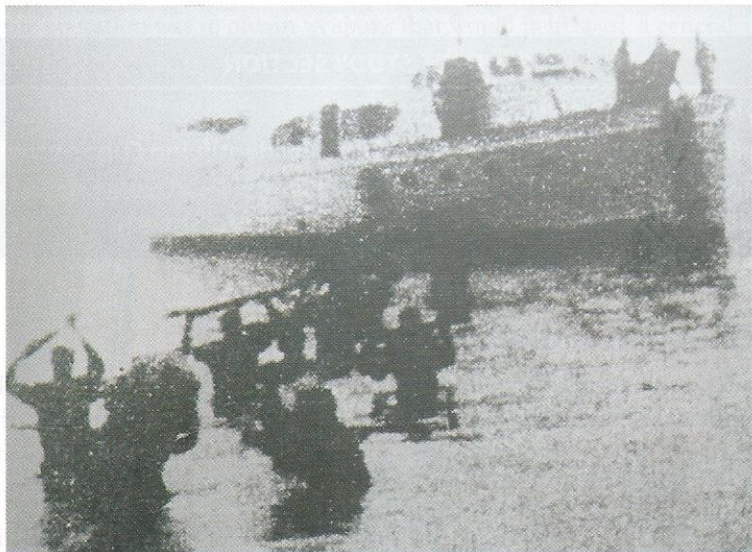
the leaders of the Moncada raid. Fidel Castro was now a free man and went into exile in Mexico to prepare the revolution.

Despite Batista's efforts to appear democratic, demonstrations in Cuba grew in size and led to armed clashes in towns and cities. Different revolutionary organizations spread through the countryside, promoting rural insurgency, sabotaging property across the island and organizing **guerrilla** groups. Communications and the delivery of food to towns and cities were often disrupted. Sugar production dropped as a consequence of acts of sabotage against sugar mills, oil refineries and railroads. Political parties – with the exception of the 26th of July Movement, which believed change in Cuba would only come after the use of force to overthrow Batista – demanded elections but Batista refused to hold them.

On 2 December 1956, Fidel Castro returned to Cuba and launched the next stage of the struggle that would take him to power.

The *Granma* expedition (1956)

In 1956, Fidel and Raúl Castro returned from exile aboard the overcrowded and poorly equipped yacht *Granma*. They landed on the southern coast of Oriente with some 80 rebels who had been recruited in Mexico.



The voyage was rough, as the *Granma* was heavily laden with men and weapons, and supplies of additional oil to enable it to reach the shores of Cuba. The radio failed and the engines were poor, so *Granma* reached Cuba two days behind schedule. The urban arm of the 26th of July Movement, under the command of **Frank País**, had prepared a strike in Santiago de Cuba in support of the landing, but coordination was affected by the delay in the *Granma*'s arrival. Castro also failed to make contact with those who had prepared land support for the operation. Spotted by government forces, Castro and his men landed in a

swamp and were forced to leave supplies and ammunition behind. They were ambushed at Alegria del Pío and those surviving (only 12 of the original 82-man crew) dispersed and hid in the Sierra Maestra to regroup and emerge as the Rebel Army.

Anti-government rebellions led by several groups in the cities continued throughout 1957 and 1958, and included an attempt to seize the presidential palace and murder Batista. Although it failed, it showed the President how difficult it had become to maintain himself in power. Batista struggled desperately to control the situation, but his response was so violent that it embittered the people against him.

The cast of characters

Fidel Castro was not alone on the road to power. Although he was the leading figure, many men and women contributed to the success of the 26th of July Movement. Some of them played an important part in the struggle for power; others continued to work in the revolutionary government. Study these photographs and biographical details carefully. You will find reference to these characters throughout the chapter.



Raúl Castro



Vilma Espín



Camilo Cienfuegos



Ernesto 'Che' Guevara



Haydée Santamaría



Celia Sánchez

Raúl Castro – Fidel's younger brother Raúl took part in the attack on the Moncada Barracks, was imprisoned with Fidel and later exiled to Mexico, from where he helped prepare the *Granma* expedition. Since 1959, he has acted as Fidel's right-hand man and has served in many key positions, such as head of the (Cuban) Communist Party, Minister of Defence and Vice-President of the Council of State. He was appointed President in 2008 after his brother resigned for health reasons.

Frank País (1934–57)
Student leader who fought against Batista since the 1952 coup and who joined the 26th of July Movement. He led the movement while Castro was in exile. His brutal murder in 1957 at the age of 23 led to one of the largest general strikes in Cuba.

'Che' Guevara (1928–67)

'Che' is an interjection widely used by Argentines when speaking. Guevara's use of it in conversations earned him the nickname of 'El Che'. Che Guevara believed in the need to expand the revolution to other areas of the world. In 1966, he arrived in Bolivia hoping to make the revolution succeed and to export it to neighbouring Argentina, Chile, Peru, Brazil and Paraguay. The Bolivian government asked the USA for help and CIA agents were sent to Bolivia to search for Guevara and his men. Guevara was captured on 8 October 1967 and was executed the following day.

Haydée Santamaría's suicide

Her suicide on an anniversary of Moncada has been explained by the fact that she had never been able to overcome the suffering she endured that day. After her brother had been tortured and refused to give any information, his eyes were pulled out of their sockets and taken to Haydée on a tray. Her boyfriend also died as a consequence of tortures after the assault.

ToK Time

In Source B, Batista used the word 'terrorists'. How far could it be said that the term is being used as a value judgement? To what extent does the choice of words affect the way we view and understand historical events?



Wilma Espín – Wife of Raúl Castro, she took part in urban uprisings in support of the *Granma* expedition. After the revolution, she founded the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC; Cuban Women's Federation) and became a member of several government organizations until her death in 2007.

Camilo Cienfuegos – A survivor of the *Granma* expedition, Cienfuegos was responsible for many of the victories of the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra. With the success of the revolution, he became head of the armed forces, but died in an aeroplane accident in 1959.

Ernesto 'Che' Guevara – A medical doctor born in Argentina, Guevara travelled throughout Latin America widely and became convinced that the region needed a solution to its poverty and corruption. He met the Castro brothers in Mexico and joined the *Granma* expedition. He was a leading figure in the Sierra Maestra fighting and became an icon of the revolution. After the revolution, he was responsible for the purges of Batistianos and other opponents. He also acted as head of the Bank of Cuba and Minister of Industry. Persuaded of the need to spread the revolution worldwide, he travelled to Congo in 1965 in support of a revolution, which ended in failure. In 1967 he was killed in Bolivia.

Haydée Santamaría – A member of the 26th of July Movement and sister to Abel. Together with her friend Melba Hernandez, she was one of the few women to participate in the Moncada assault. She then became responsible for distributing copies of Castro's 'History will absolve me' speech. Her role in the development of a Cuban culture after the revolution was fundamental. In 1959 she founded Casa de las Américas, a key literary institution of Cuba, which was visited by leading intellectuals and artists from all over the world. She committed suicide on 26 July 1980.

Celia Sánchez – A close friend of Fidel and an early member of the 26th of July Movement, she was responsible for providing land support for the *Granma* expedition. Once in Sierra Maestra, she contributed to the founding of the female 'Mariana Grajales' army. She occupied different government positions until her death in 1980.

SOURCE B

Bombs exploded in the capital. Two stores were attacked and in the exchange between police and the assailants, three uniformed men were killed and several wounded. Twenty civilians died. On interurban and rural transportation lines, drivers of trucks and buses, as well as automobile passengers, were attacked and killed. When the strike failed, the terrorists sabotaged the electric companies and plants, throwing many rural cities into darkness. For three days a section of Old Havana had no lights. To make repairs more difficult, the aggressors blew up one of the main outlets which used special cables not found in the Cuban market.

From Fulgencio Batista, *Cuba Betrayed*, 1962

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

QUESTIONS

- According to Source B, which methods were used by the rebels to fight?
- With reference to its origins and purpose, assess the value and limitations of Source B to an historian studying the nature of the Cuban Revolution.

In the Sierra Maestra mountains (1956–59)

Support for Castro and the rebels by the people from the Sierra Maestra increased with time, and varied from supplying the army with food and shelter to joining the rebels. There

were several reasons why people all across Cuba felt attracted to the 26th of July Movement. First, peasants got to know a totally different type of army to the national army Batista had often used to suppress unrest. Castro's forces did not steal from the peasants and always paid for the food they were given. They respected women, put their medical doctors at the service of the peasants, taught them to read and write and even helped in the household chores. Any soldier breaking this code was sentenced to death. Peasants received more from the Rebel Army than they had ever received from the Cuban government.

Another factor that contributed to the popularity of and support for the Rebel Army was that their leaders explained what they were fighting for and what kind of new society they were hoping to achieve. The most important element in the new programme was the Agrarian Reform. The 26th of July Movement promised peasants an end to the ownership of large estates by a small sector of society or companies, and committed themselves to a fairer distribution of the land.

The rebels made use of the radio to spread their message and news about events in the Sierra. Radio Rebelde ('Rebel Radio') began to broadcast from 'the territory of Free Cuba in the Sierra' in 1958. People tuned in because they relied more on the news from Radio Rebelde than on the government media. Castro himself addressed the people on Radio Rebelde in a style that everyone understood. He also made sure people found out what government censorship was hiding from them about the fight against Batista.

News about the progress made in the Sierra Maestra encouraged urban support for the revolution. Workers in towns and cities joined the revolution underground. They printed leaflets in support of the rebels and condemning Batista. They planted homemade bombs to blow up government installations, railways and public buildings, and sabotaged telephone lines, electricity stations and gas services. They assassinated those they believed to be enemies of the revolution.



Fidel Castro talks with local people. What is the message of this photo?

SOURCE C

In the two-year period from Christmas, 1956, when the twelve men were alone on the mountain top until Batista fled and his army surrendered on January 1, 1959, nearly all classes of the population had identified themselves, in varying degrees, with the July 26th Movement. Some became an integral part of it because they believed in its revolutionary program; others made common cause with it because it had become the most effective force in the struggle to overthrow Batista.

To offset this overwhelming superiority in men and weapons, the revolutionary army had three advantages: (1) the battle was to be on its home grounds, a terrain of rugged mountains and treacherous jungle made to order for guerrilla warfare and defensive fighting; (2) unlike the government soldiers, the rebel soldiers weren't paid for fighting – they fought for something they believed in; (3) their leaders were men of outstanding ability – inspiring, humane, and master strategists in guerrilla warfare.

The rebel leaders' humanity – and excellent strategy – were illustrated in the order to the revolutionary army that captured soldiers were to be treated with kindness, their wounded given medical attention.

From Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, *Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution*, 1960

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

QUESTIONS

- a) What light does Source C throw on the reasons why the 26th of July Movement and the Rebel Army gained support across the country?
- b) What other reasons can you provide to explain the success of the Rebel Army?

Fighting in itself did not guarantee the success of the revolution. The 26th of July Movement also needed to make alliances with other political parties and define the future of Cuba after the fall of Batista. Castro, aware of such needs, made contact with leaders from different political parties. By 1958, under the Pact of Caracas, the vast majority of the opposition recognized the leadership of Fidel Castro in the struggle to overthrow Batista. The Pact of Caracas included all the main political parties and organizations, even the communist PSP, which had remained critical of the Moncada attack and Castro's leadership until then. The pact was a heavy blow to Batista, as it openly exposed his political isolation.

To what extent did Batista contribute to the success of the revolution?

The success of the guerrilla war was due in part to the excesses of the incumbent regime. The police and the army imprisoned and tortured anyone they suspected of being a rebel or having helped rebels. This policy led to the death and imprisonment of many innocent men and women. To reduce support for the rebels, Batista ordered peasants to evacuate whole areas of the countryside, and those who remained behind were treated as traitors. In an attempt to wipe out rebels who could not be seen in the thick jungle, entire plantations were set on fire, causing the peasants to lose their crops. The government wanted to frighten citizens so that they would not help the rebels, but instead people were drawn to the rebels, in hatred of the government. Batista not only pushed people away from him, but also away from more moderate opposition into the arms of Fidel Castro, the 26th of July Movement and the Rebel Army.

Batista launched a major attack against the guerrillas in the Sierras in July 1958, but the campaign failed. Soldiers, fearful of the guerrilla forces and often isolated from relief, deserted in massive numbers or surrendered to the rebels without firing a shot. The weapons and equipment left behind by deserting soldiers were used by the resistance.

Elections were held in 1958 but Batista's candidate, Andrés Rivero, was fixed to win. This outcome disappointed the few who still hoped for a democratic solution to the conflict. For the same reasons, Rivero did not obtain US backing. In disagreement with Batista's violent actions, the USA imposed an arms embargo on Cuba in March 1958. The US position complicated government access to weapons and ammunitions and had a demoralizing effect on the army.

Batista still refused to negotiate. He rejected a proposal from the USA for him to capitulate to a caretaker government, to which the USA could give military and diplomatic support in order to prevent Fidel Castro coming to power. US officials feared Castro might turn to communism.

To access Worksheet 3.1 on the success of the Cuban revolution, please visit www.pearsonbacconline.com and follow the on-screen instructions.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

GROUP DISCUSSION

You have now read about the reasons why support for Castro grew and about Batista's mistakes and miscalculations. In groups, discuss the relative importance you think each factor had in contributing to the fall of Batista and the rise of Castro.

Now consider the following question: How and why did Fidel Castro come to power in Cuba?

Under 'why' (reasons) you are being asked about factors that contributed to Castro's rise. These could include an analysis of the economic and social problems in Cuba before 1959; the failure of previous governments to address these issues and the consequences of that failure; the greed and corruption prevailing in society; the suspension of the 1940 constitution after 1952; the part played by Batista; and the reasons why Castro was appealing to different sectors of the Cuban population, among other relevant factors. Be careful not to produce a narrative of the historical background; you should focus on the links between Castro's rise and each condition you select. You may want to go back to the period before 1953 (for example, to explain the economic problems of Cuba), but the focus should remain on Castro and the events as from 1953.

The second part of the question asks you to explain how Castro came to power; that is, the methods he used.

Read the following paragraph on how Castro came to power:

Student Answer – Antonio

Fidel Castro was seen as someone who could bring genuine change to Cuban society. His promises to end corruption in the government and to produce a fairer society were of great importance to gain him the support of peasants in the Sierras. The fact that his soldiers helped with the harvest and taught the peasants to read and write also showed that they meant to bring about genuine change in society. Castro was seen as a hero and that helped his rise.

Examiner's comments

This paragraph focuses on a specific example of Castro's methods – his popular appeal. The candidate shows he understands how the conditions against which Castro rose were used to present his movement as one prepared to bring about genuine change, explaining how Castro's men related to the peasants and using specific examples to prove a point. However, this response could offer a deeper level of analysis. For example: why were the promises to end corruption and bring about justice of such importance? To whom? Castro was certainly not the only opponent to the government who believed in the need for such change, so what made him different? Was it perhaps the fact that he had dared act upon his beliefs in the Moncada assault? Who saw Castro as a hero? Why did this contribute to his rise?

REVISION ACTIVITY

Make a list of the methods used by Fidel Castro. Can you think of specific examples for each of the methods listed?

● Examiner's hint

This is a two-part question. It asks you to explain why (reasons) and how (methods) Castro came to power. Both aspects of the question must be addressed and you need to show clear knowledge and understanding of both reasons and methods.

● Examiner's hint

It is not sufficient to show that you know which methods Castro used in his rise to power. You also need to explain how they contributed to his rise. A paragraph explaining the events of the Moncada assault will not be an effective way to address how Castro came to power. You will need to explain the significance of the event in Castro's road to power by, for example, explaining how the use of force in Moncada enabled the Cuban population to identify Castro as a leader of the opposition who was prepared to act in order to change the situation.

The triumph of the revolution

After the success against Batista's forces in the Sierra, Castro believed the time had come to spread the war to the other Cuban provinces. He trusted Camilo Cienfuegos, Raúl Castro and Che Guevara to lead the campaigns. As they moved around, they were joined by more

volunteers, marching at night or under the rain to hide from Batista's planes. By Christmas 1958, the city of Santa Clara, capital of the province of Las Villas, had been taken. Raúl and Fidel Castro marched towards Santiago de Cuba, while in Havana rebel leaders increased their acts of sabotage and their attacks against army installations. Politically isolated and unable to control the situation, Batista fled Cuba on 1 January 1959. The army refused to continue fighting against the rebels and an immediate ceasefire was ordered. Soon after, Fidel Castro and his *barbudos* ('bearded men') entered Havana and established a provisional government.

One explanation for Fidel Castro's rise to power can be found in his charisma. In an attempt to explain the sources of authority (i.e. why a leader was obeyed by the people), sociologist Max Weber defined the characteristics of charismatic leadership. He considers authority to come from the fact that the leader is set apart from the rest of the people because of his exceptional personal qualities or his exemplary actions, which inspire loyalty among his followers.

Eric Selbin in *Modern Latin American Revolutions* analyzes the part played by charisma in revolutions. He states that charismatic leaders promote and make the revolutionary process possible by their ability to represent the people's needs and aspirations in a vision of the future. Charismatic figures represent the potential for rejecting an old order, creating attractive future possibilities for the people.

STUDENT STUDY SECTION

Analyze the following sources and answer the questions below each.

SOURCE D

Photograph taken at a speech given by Fidel Castro in January 1959. The man behind Castro is Camilo Cienfuegos.

