

"Electricity and food": protests in eastern Cuba



Street protests in Santiago de Cuba on March 17, 2024 (Source: [X](#))

Street protests broke out in Cuba on Sunday. Apparently several hundred people gathered in Santiago de Cuba, the country's second largest city. According to [videos](#) circulating on social media, slogans such as "electricity and food" (Comida y corriente) were shouted. Some of the protesters also [chanted](#) the slogan "Patria y Vida" (Fatherland and Life), which was first chanted during the nationwide [protests on July 11, 2021](#), in reference to the revolutionary slogan "Patria o Muerte" (Fatherland or Death).

The protests took place in the context of ongoing daily power cuts as a result of a severe energy crisis ([Cuba Heute reported](#)). Information on the current power shortage has been scarce in recent weeks. It was only on Saturday that Energy Minister Vicente de la O Levy [provided](#) more detailed information on the power supply situation in the evening news, which the minister expects to improve noticeably with new fuel supplies, not before the beginning of April. In addition, there are repeated delays in the basic supply via the state supply booklet "Libreta". As the local authorities [explained](#), there were specific problems in Santiago with [milk powder rations for children](#) and sugar deliveries, which would now be resolved immediately. Trucks [delivered](#) special rations in Santiago on Sunday. Smaller protests had already taken place at the end of last week in the provinces of Holguín and Camagüey, which were further [encouraged](#) by government opponents on social networks.

At the rally along the central road towards the Morro fortress, the First Party Secretary of Santiago, Beatriz Johnson Urrutia, [tried](#) to enter into a dialog with the protesters with [little success](#). She herself then emphasized the respectful attitude of the inhabitants of Santiago

de Cuba. The heated situation passed off peacefully and the security forces that had arrived allowed the protesters to leave. After dark, [arrests](#) were apparently made during smaller protests in Bayamo. [Later that evening](#), protests in the form of pot-banging also took place in the western Cuban city of Cárdenas. People also took to the streets in [El Cobre](#), a suburb of Santiago. Internet access on the island was temporarily restricted. The Republican Cuban-American senator and former mayor of Miami, Carlos A. Giménez, [called](#) on the Biden administration on the short message service X to provide satellite internet in Cuba "immediately".

Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel [commented](#) on the events on X on Sunday. "Several people" had expressed their dissatisfaction with the electricity and food supply, the president explained. "This context is being exploited by the enemies of the revolution for destabilizing purposes," said Díaz-Canel, who accused the United States of deliberately fomenting unrest through "terrorists". The party, state, and government were prepared "to always respond to the demands of our people in an atmosphere of calm, to listen, to engage in dialog, and to explain the numerous steps being taken to improve the situation," said Díaz-Canel. Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez [wrote on X on Monday night](#) that "the direct and cruel responsibility of the USA for the country's difficult economic situation" was known, and called on the US embassy in Havana not to interfere in the country's internal affairs.

On Monday, Cuba's Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossio summoned the chargé d'affaires of the US embassy in Havana, Benjamin Ziff, to the Foreign Ministry. "If the government of the United States had even the slightest and sincere concern for the well-being of the Cuban people, it would remove Cuba from the arbitrary list of states that allegedly support terrorism," the Cuban Foreign Ministry subsequently [stated](#) in a diplomatic note. The US State Department [described](#) the accusation that the US government was supporting violent actions against the Cuban government as "absurd".

The protests were the largest in Cuba since 2021. The last major street protests took place [last May](#) in the small eastern Cuban town of Caimanera as a result of electricity and supply shortages. ([Cubaheute](#))