

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee
on Oversight and Investigations,
Committee on Energy and Commerce,
House of Representatives

August 1990

BROADCASTS TO CUBA

TV Marti Surveys Are Flawed



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**National Security and
International Affairs Division**

B-240007

August 9, 1990

The Honorable John D. Dingell
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In response to your request, we have reviewed the U.S. Information Agency's (USIA) efforts to assess the effectiveness of TV Marti reception in Cuba from March 27 to May 12, 1990. USIA conducted two surveys in making its assessment. The objectives of our review were to determine if the methodology used in these two surveys and the reporting of the results were consistent with sound data-gathering techniques and supported valid conclusions. The surveys were conducted to obtain information from Cuban visitors, emigres, refugees, and other visitors arriving in Miami, Florida, between March 28 and May 12, 1990. We also reviewed information from the U.S. Interest Section in Havana about the effectiveness of Cuban efforts to jam the TV Marti broadcasts.

Background

In 1988, Public Law 100-459 authorized USIA to establish television broadcasting to Cuba. Congress appropriated \$23.3 million to establish TV Marti and to test its capability to broadcast into Cuba. The legislation required a test be made to demonstrate that broadcasting to Cuba would be feasible and not interfere with U.S. domestic broadcasting. The administration conducted a 90-day test. On March 27, 1990, USIA began test broadcasts from TV Marti facilities in Florida. TV Marti programming originated from Washington, D.C., where the signal was beamed via satellite to Cudjoe Key, Florida, about 110 miles from Havana. The signal was relayed to an airborne transmitter tethered about 10,000 feet above the key. The test broadcasts were primarily aimed at the Havana area between the hours of 3:45 a.m. and 6:45 a.m. Eastern Standard Time.

Results in Brief

USIA's survey results are flawed because they make projections on the reception of TV Marti based on incorrect application of generally recognized methodological techniques. Moreover, the survey results differ widely from information reported by the U.S. Interest Section in

Havana. Based on one of its surveys, USIA reported that of 424 respondents who tried to tune in, 112 respondents, or 26 percent, were able to view TV Marti for 5 minutes or more. Projections from this survey indicated that 273,000 households in Havana and three western provinces, and between 1 million to 1.3 million Cubans could have viewed TV Marti during the test period. An earlier USIA survey reported that as many as 7.3 million Cubans could have viewed TV Marti. These projections are invalid because they were not based on a random sample and did not demonstrate the similarity of respondents to Cuban households or to the Cuban population.

Contrary to the survey results, the U.S. Interest Section in Havana reported that less than one percent of persons interviewed in Cuba had been able to view TV Marti and that its monitoring of the broadcasts showed that TV Marti was effectively jammed by the Cuban government.

USIA Surveys Are Methodologically Flawed

To assess the Cubans' viewership of TV Marti, USIA developed two sets of questionnaires to use in interviewing visitors arriving in Miami, Florida, from Cuba. Both questionnaires and the reported results had methodological flaws that made the results invalid.

For the first questionnaire, prepared by USIA's Radio Marti research and policy staff in Miami, Florida, interviewers took hearsay information and made no apparent attempt to verify it, and they did not provide complete descriptions of the demographic characteristics of interviewees. Most important, the survey was not a representative sample of TV Marti's primary target area. Instead, USIA took a nonrandom sample by interviewing 1,018 Cuban visitors, emigres, refugees, and other visitors arriving at Miami International Airport from March 28 to April 18, 1990.

Radio Marti's report on the results of this first survey stated that TV Marti was "received in practically all of the Cuban territory with acceptable quality" and that the potential population receiving the signal was about 7.3 million. USIA research staff also noted several problems with the survey methodology and concluded that "the study does not yield reliable and valid results."

The second questionnaire developed by Radio Marti's Audience Research Staff in Washington, D.C., also attempted to correlate the

Miami Airport respondents with the entire Cuban population and households. The conclusions drawn from the results are invalid because USIA did not take a random sample of the Cuban population or households. Using data from this questionnaire, USIA and a USIA contractor prepared reports that contain inappropriate statistical generalizations about the viewership of TV Marti.

A preliminary report of the survey results, dated May 21, 1990, projected that between 1 million and 1.3 million Cubans were able to receive TV Marti during the first 6 weeks of broadcasts. Projections were based on the comments of 112 respondents, who indicated that they were able to view TV Marti for 5 minutes or more. The 112 respondents were 26 percent of 424 respondents who claimed that they had tried to view TV Marti.

Using the same survey data, a USIA contractor prepared a second report, dated June 4, 1990, which projected that 273,000, or 28 percent, of the households in the primary target area of Havana and three western provinces would have been able to receive TV Marti. In the Havana area alone, the report projected that 33 percent of households were able to receive TV Marti.

Based on the surveys of persons arriving at Miami International Airport, the USIA contractor projected potential viewership, even though its report stated that such projections are not statistically appropriate and are biased. To make valid projections, a random sample of the population or households in the target area would be required. However, the two USIA reports acknowledge that a random sample of Cuban population and households was not possible because Cuba is a closed society. Further, the validity of these projections can be questioned because the June report provides data showing that 24 of the 112 respondents, or 21 percent, said they watched TV Marti on 4 days when there was no broadcast due to bad weather conditions or technical problems.

In the absence of a random sample, the persuasiveness of survey results depends on how completely the sample represents the Cuban population and households in the target area. However, the May 1990 report does not compare the Miami Airport respondents to the Cuban population, and the June 1990 report does not adequately demonstrate that the respondents were representative of Havana area households. In fact, the June report shows that the respondents were not representative in several respects. For example, 61 percent of the survey respondents were

55 or older and about one-third were political refugees or emigres. However, the report analysis shows that only 19 percent of the Cuban population is 55 or older, and the report indicates that refugees or emigres would be more interested and aware of TV Marti than the general population. These two factors indicate that the respondents were not representative.

Further, the June report makes projections to households of Havana and three western provinces without providing evidence that respondents' households were typical of households in the target area. Therefore, the report projections do not provide persuasive evidence that the respondents are representative of the demographic and geographic characteristics of Havana and surrounding area households.

Conflicting Information on TV Marti Reception

Throughout the test period, U.S. officials stationed at the U.S. Interest Section in Havana monitored and reported on TV Marti reception. Their information on the extent of viewership and reception differs significantly from the reported results of survey respondents in Miami. According to the U.S. Interest Section, extensive monitoring of TV Marti in the Havana area, trips to various parts of the country, interviews with various persons in Cuba, and results from questionnaires provided to visitors to the consulate show that the Cuban government was effectively jamming TV Marti. In addition, the Section reported that less than one percent of Cubans have actually viewed TV Marti without disruption, especially in the Havana area. Details on the extent of TV Marti reception in Cuba are classified.

This information conflicts significantly with USIA's May report, which projected 26 percent population viewership, and with the June report, which projected 28 percent of household viewership in Havana and three western provinces. USIA officials could not reconcile these differences. However, they believed that TV Marti was reaching some portion of the Cuban population.

Scope and Methodology

We met with officials and obtained documents and records from USIA headquarters, the Voice of America, TV Marti, and the State Department in the United States and from the U.S. Interest Section in Havana. We obtained and reviewed pertinent reports and information related to TV Marti broadcasts to Cuba.

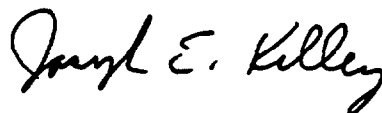
We analyzed the methodology and reports used by USIA to measure TV Marti reception in Cuba to determine whether they were conducted in accordance with sound methodological and sampling techniques. Such techniques are subjects of a large body of literature. Our references include works by Leslie Kish, W. Edwards Deming, and William G. Cochran. The references discuss the limitations of nonrandom sampling in projecting or generalizing study results.¹

As requested, we did not ask USIA to provide written comments on a draft of this report. However, we discussed the results of our work with USIA officials and considered their comments in preparing this report. Our work was conducted between April and July 1990 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to USIA's Director, the Secretary of State, and other interested congressional committees. Copies will also be made available to others on request.

Please contact me at (202) 275-4128 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Major contributors to this report were Jess T. Ford, Assistant Director; Marilyn Mauch, Assistant Director; John Gallant, Evaluator-in-Charge; and Arthur James, Statistician.

Sincerely yours,



Joseph E. Kelley
Director, Security and International
Relations Issues

¹L. Kish, Survey Sampling (New York: Wiley, 1965), pp. 18-29; W. Deming, Sample Design in Business Research (New York: Wiley, 1960), p. 28; W. Cochran, Sampling Techniques (New York: Wiley, 1977).

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