

GAO
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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-09-127](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

For more than two decades, the U.S. government has been broadcasting to Cuba to break the Cuban government’s information blockade and promote democracy in Cuba. Over this period, questions have been raised regarding the quality and effectiveness of these broadcasts. GAO was asked to examine (1) the Office of Cuba Broadcasting’s (OCB) broadcasting approach and what is known about its audience; (2) how the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG)—which oversees U.S. government broadcasting—and OCB ensure compliance with journalistic principles; (3) steps taken to ensure adherence to domestic and international broadcasting laws, agreements, and standards; and (4) steps BBG and OCB have taken to address management challenges. GAO analyzed documentation related to strategic planning, audience research, oversight, and operations and interviewed officials from BBG, BBG’s International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB), OCB, State, and other agencies.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to BBG to analyze the relative return on investment from each of OCB’s transmission methods, coordinate the sharing of audience research, enhance guidance and training to improve adherence to journalistic standards, ensure that inappropriate advertisements do not appear during OCB broadcasts, and improve communication with OCB employees. BBG generally agreed with the recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-127](#). For more information, contact Jess Ford at (202) 512-4128 or FordJ@gao.gov.

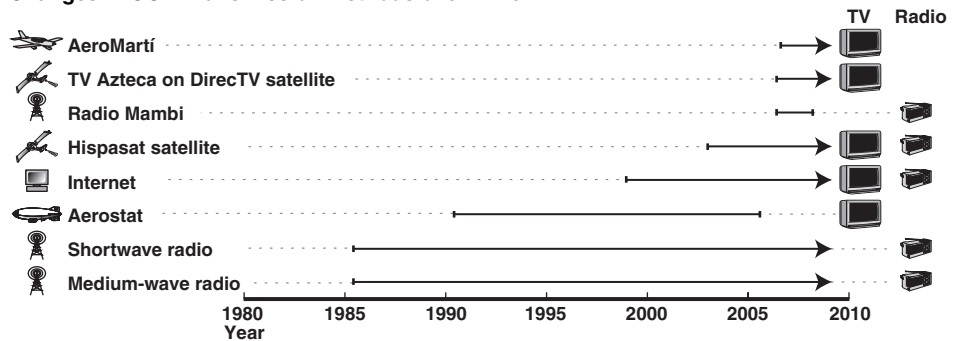
BROADCASTING TO CUBA

Actions Are Needed to Improve Strategy and Operations

What GAO Found

OCB broadcasts Radio and TV Martí through multiple transmission methods that face varying levels of jamming by the Cuban government. While there are no nationally representative data and some surveys of recent Cuban émigrés suggest a larger audience, the best available research suggests that Radio and TV Martí’s audience is small. Specifically, less than 2 percent of respondents to telephone surveys since 2003 reported tuning in to Radio or TV Martí during the past week. Despite the importance of audience research, we found minimal sharing of such research among available sources. Because of limitations in the audience research data, decisionmakers lack basic information to help assess the relative success or return on investment from each of OCB’s transmission methods.

Changes in OCB Transmission Methods over Time



Sources: GAO analysis of Office of Cuba Broadcasting and Department of State data; Nova Development (clip art).

BBG’s IBB—which directly oversees OCB—has established an annual program review process that serves as the main mechanism for assessing OCB’s compliance with journalistic standards. While IBB officials report that the quality of OCB programming has improved in recent years, IBB reviews since 2003 have recommended improving adherence to certain journalistic standards, particularly in the areas of balance and objectivity. IBB’s process provides useful feedback, but we found weaknesses such as limited training and operational guidance for staff conducting the reviews.

OCB and IBB have taken steps to ensure that U.S. broadcasting adheres to relevant laws and standards, but some concerns remain. To comply with U.S. law, they have taken steps to minimize the domestic dissemination of OCB programming; however, OCB broadcasts reach U.S. audiences in several ways, such as through the Internet. In addition, a commercial TV station contracted to broadcast OCB programming showed some inappropriate advertisements during OCB programs. Furthermore, an international body found that OCB’s TV broadcasts cause harmful interference to Cuban broadcasts, but the U.S. government has not taken steps to address this issue.

Despite some efforts by BBG and OCB, oversight entities have identified problems such as poor communication by OCB management and low employee morale. For example, OCB lacks formal mechanisms for communicating with or obtaining information from employees.