AFCLC

EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE

# FIELD GUIDE

## Uruguay

U.S. AIR FORCE

# About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 "Culture General" provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Southern Cone

Part 2 "Culture Specific" describes unique cultural features of Uruguayan society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training

For further information, contact a member of the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil or visit the AFCLC website at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/.



***Please scroll over images to view captions.***

ECFG The Oriental Republic of Uruguay

# PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

## What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity).

## Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

### Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

### Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

### Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.


This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It

helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

**Cultural Belief System**

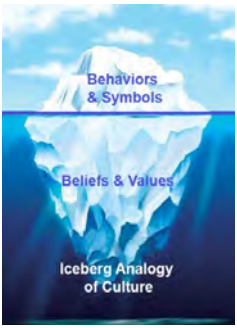
An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters.

Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

## Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).




In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel through the Southern Cone, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

# CULTURAL DOMAINS

## 1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

The Southern Cone includes four countries on the South American continent: Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Scientists believe that early humans entered the region around 13,000 years ago. Between 5,000-2,500 years ago, they developed agriculture, and over time, some groups remained nomadic hunter-gatherers, while others settled in communities. By the 15th century, the population comprised a variety of ethnolinguistic groups, with some territories in northern Chile and Argentina controlled by the powerful Inca Empire from its center in present-day Peru.

In the 16th century, Spaniards conquered much of the Americas, seeking wealth, enhanced social status, and the spread of Catholicism. Columbus touched on the Venezuelan coast in 1498, while other explorers landed on Colombia's Caribbean coast in 1499, then conquered Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia by 1541. Meanwhile, Spanish and Portuguese explorers were sailing along the Southern Cone's Atlantic coastline. In 1536, Spaniards founded Buenos Aires (present-day capital of Argentina) and Asunción (present day capital of Paraguay) a year later. Moving overland from Peru, other Spanish conquerors founded Santiago (Chile's modern-day capital) in 1541. By contrast, Uruguay saw little Spanish settlement until the early 17th century, then the founding of Montevideo (its present-day capital) in 1726 as a counter to the Portuguese presence in

neighboring Brazil. The Spaniards introduced horses, cattle, and sheep, establishing ***estancias*** (large ranches) that relied on forced indigenous labor or enslaved Africans (primarily in Uruguay) and later, ***gauchos*** (hired ranch hands, often European immigrants). Over the years, the region's indigenous populations reduced due to conflict, disease, famine, and their exploitation in forced labor systems. In Paraguay, the Catholic Church forcibly resettled indigenous people in order to convert them. Some indigenous communities violently resisted the Europeans for centuries.

In the early 19th century, some local leaders began to seek autonomy from the Spanish Crown. Following several years of armed struggle, Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay achieved independence by 1818. Meanwhile, Uruguay, though claimed by Argentina, was annexed by Brazil in 1821, leading to war. After international mediation, the independent state of Uruguay was created as a buffer between Brazil and Argentina in 1828.

Border disputes and economic competition spurred conflicts across South America in subsequent decades. Chile invaded neighboring Bolivia and Peru in 1836, and Paraguay's violent confrontations with Brazil and Argentina in 1858 subsided only after the appearance of US and British navies. The devastating 1864-70 War of the Triple Alliance pitted Paraguay against Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay and resulted in the deaths of two-thirds of Paraguay's male residents and the loss of one-quarter of its territory. In 1883, Chile gained new territories when it won the War of the Pacific against Peru and Bolivia.

Meanwhile, indigenous resistance in Argentina and Chile had continued. To open additional territory for European immigrants, those governments launched campaigns against the indigenous rebels in the late 19th century, killing or displacing thousands from their traditional lands. In the 1930s, Paraguay prevailed in the Chaco War against Bolivia, gaining disputed territory but causing significant losses to both sides.

Beginning in the mid-20th century, a wave of authoritarian leaders seized power. Prominent dictators included Juan Perón in Argentina (1946-55 and 1973-74), Gen Augusto Pinochet in Chile (1973-90), and Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay (1954-89).

Such regimes typically imposed censorship, banned trade unions, dissolved national legislatures, and outlawed political activities, though they often received the support of the US due to their anti-communist stances. These regimes also frequently detained, tortured, and murdered tens of thousands of their own people. In the 1970s, the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile and military regimes in Argentina and Uruguay perpetuated numerous human rights abuses, with the plight of the "disappeared" victims receiving worldwide attention.

In the 1980s, democracy and civilian rule returned to the Southern Cone. In recent decades, Argentina and Paraguay have experienced political volatility and serious economic challenges. Although a stable democracy, Chile struggles to respond to ongoing social unrest prompted by wealth inequalities. Considered one of the world's strongest democracies today, Uruguay has the region's lowest levels of corruption, poverty, and inequality.

## 2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. The Spanish conquest and colonial rule changed society in the Southern Cone considerably. Further, the decimation of the indigenous population, import of enslaved Africans, and arrival of European immigrants in the 19th-20th centuries permanently altered the region's ethnic and racial makeup.

Today, the residents of the Southern Cone are mostly of European or mixed European and indigenous ancestry, with most Argentines, Uruguayans, and Chileans identifying with their European roots. By contrast, Paraguayans are proud of their mixed Spanish and indigenous Guaraní heritage, viewing it as the fundamental aspect of Paraguayan national identity. Some 2.4% of Argentines and Uruguayans and 2% of Paraguayans identify solely as indigenous, compared to 13% of Chileans. Almost 5% of Uruguayans claim a Black identity, and a small number of Chileans and Argentines also have African ancestry. Generally, indigenous and Black residents across the region tend to be poorer, less educated, and face discrimination. Indigenous communities also struggle to attain rights to their traditional lands.

All the Southern Cone countries today are presidential republics. Since the 1983 return of democracy, most Argentine Presidents have been adherents of Peronism – the populist and nationalist policies espoused by former President Perón. Elected in 2023, President Javier Gerardo Milei has Victoria Villarruel serve as his Vice President.

Between 2006 and 2022, the Chilean Presidency has alternated between socialist Michelle Bachelet and conservative Sebastián Piñera. Although representing opposite ends of the political spectrum, they both faced large-scale public unrest. Since 2022, Gabriel Boric Font, Chile's youngest President and a progressive, has focused his term on constitutional reforms.

Except for the period 2008-13, the conservative Colorado Party (ANR) has dominated politics in Paraguay since 1947. Taking office in 2023, Santiago Peña Palacios actually started his pollical life as a member of the Liberal Party but switched parties in 2017 and was elected representing the Colorado Party.

Since the 1985 return of democracy in Uruguay, parties and coalitions from across the political spectrum have held the Presidency. After 15 years of

rule by a center-left coalition, the conservatives returned to power with the 2019 victory of Luis Lacalle Pou. Then, in a close vote in 2024, Uruguay elected Yamandú Ramón Antonio Orsi Martínez of the left-leaning Broad Front party as President.

Relationships in the region are occasionally tense due to territorial disputes, illegal activities in porous border regions, and the influx of illegal migrants, most recently from Venezuela. In 1982, Argentina invaded and briefly held the United Kingdom (UK)-administered Falkland Islands. Today, Argentina continues to claim these and other UK-held territories in the South Atlantic, occasionally leading to tense relations.

## 3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

The Spanish conquerors introduced Christianity beginning in the early 16th century. As Roman Catholicism spread, the Catholic Church became entrenched in colonial life. Today, the Catholic Church remains an important part of many communities, a significant provider of social services, and an influential organization with sometimes strong political and social influence.

Roman Catholicism remains the dominant religion in the region, with around 90% of Paraguayans and some two-thirds of Argentines and Chileans identifying as Catholic. By contrast, less than half of Uruguayans claim a Catholic identity, while over one-third report religious beliefs without any formal affiliation. At least 15% of Argentines, Chileans, and Uruguayans and around 6% of Paraguayans are Protestant Christians. Secularism is growing in the region, with some 17% of Chileans and 19% of Argentines reporting no religious affiliation in recent surveys.

Other faiths with a presence in the region include Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith. Argentina has the region's largest Jewish (some 220,000) and Muslim (up to 1 million) populations.

None of the Southern Cone countries names an official religion, though the Argentine Constitution grants a preferential legal status to the Roman Catholic Church.

## 4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of Southern Cone societies. Regional inhabitants tend to maintain strong connections with family members, supporting them emotionally and financially, while providing physical care for elderly or ailing kin if needed. Residence patterns differ somewhat across the region, though multiple generations often reside together in one household or live in close proximity.

While close family ties mean relatives have some influence over children's choice of spouses, both genders generally choose their own partners. Both Spanish traditions and Roman Catholic teachings strongly value marriage as an institution and discourage divorce. Nevertheless, divorce rates have risen in recent years, as women have gained social and economic independence.

Most residents live in urban areas, notably over 96% of Uruguayans and around 93% of Argentines and 88% of Chileans. By contrast, less than two-thirds of Paraguayans are urban dwellers. Urbanization has changed life in many areas. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available in urban areas, family structures have become more diverse.

While many upper income residents in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Santiago inhabit luxurious high-rise apartments, many cities lack affordable housing. As a result, some residents occupy crowded sub-standard housing in make-shift communities on urban peripheries.

## 5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The cultures of the Southern Cone traditionally privilege the male's role as provider and leader. ***Machismo***, or masculine behavior and pride, is an important element of male identity in many areas, while women traditionally occupy subordinate domestic roles. Women have acquired equal rights under the law, though social, economic, and political inequalities between the genders remain.

Despite most countries' progressive gender equality laws and policies, women face continued challenges to their participation in the workforce. In much of the region, women still assume the traditional roles of wives and mothers, oftentimes having to balance both domestic duties and employment in the workforce. Moreover, women often face gender discrimination in hiring and promotion processes. Female workforce participation rates range from a high of 60% in Paraguay to around 51% in Chile.

Women have a long history of serving in public office in the Southern Cone. When Isabel Martínez de Perón assumed the Argentine Presidency following her husband's 1974 death, she became the world's first female President. Since then, both Argentina and Chile have had female heads of state. Generally, Argentina has the largest female participation in politics, ranking 17th in the world in 2022, when women held over 44% of seats

in the national legislature. Paraguay tends to have the lowest rates, with women holding some 15% of such seats in the 2023 legislative elections.

Fertility rates have fallen significantly in recent decades, with

Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay averaging fewer than 2 children per woman and Argentina around 2.2. The decrease has been starkest in Paraguay, with the rate declining from 6.5 to 2.3 children per woman between 1960-2023. Since 2012 and 2020, abortion is legal in Uruguay and Argentina, respectively. In Chile and Paraguay, the procedure is illegal except in a few circumstances.

In 2010, Argentina became the first Latin American country to legalize same-sex marriage. Uruguay followed in 2012 and Chile in 2022. Uruguay has since emerged as a Latin American leader in homosexual rights, permitting homosexual individuals to serve openly in the military. Same-sex marriage remains illegal in Paraguay.

## 6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

As a result of the Spanish conquest and colonialism, Spanish is an official language in every Southern Cone country and is the region's most widely spoken language. However, Paraguay's Constitution also names Guaraní, an indigenous language, as an official one alongside Spanish. Almost 90% of Paraguayans speak Guaraní, though most also speak Spanish. As of 2021, Chilean law outlines protections for nine indigenous languages yet grants them no official recognition. Chileans are hopeful these languages will receive official recognition in Chile's new Constitution.

Some Argentines and Uruguayans speak a Spanish variety having an accent and vocabulary resembling those of certain Italian dialects. Along the Uruguay-Brazil border, some residents speak a mixture of Portuguese and Spanish.

## 7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

While education has improved across the region in recent years, quality and completion vary. Chile and Uruguay performed highest in the most recent international assessments, though they, like all the Southern Cone countries, show large gaps between high- and low-achieving students.

Access to education has increased significantly in recent decades, especially at pre-primary and secondary levels. Generally, children from poor and rural backgrounds are less likely to attend school and more likely to receive a lower-quality education. Argentina and Chile lead the region in secondary enrollment rates. By contrast, Paraguay lags in enrollment at all levels, from pre-primary to secondary. Uruguay has the region's highest repetition rates at the lower secondary level.

Literacy rates reflect the region's varied education landscape, ranging from 95% in Paraguay to 97% in Chile and nearly universal in Argentina and Uruguay. Public investment in education also varies, usually lowest in Paraguay.

## 8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. While the pace of life in the Southern Cone is somewhat faster than in many other parts of Latin America, establishing and maintaining relationships often take precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner. The workday runs on a schedule similar to the US, though some businesses and shops may close for mid-day break of around 2 hours, extending their hours into the evening.

The rhythm of daily life typically changes during national holidays, many reflecting Christian traditions and historical events. Communities throughout the region celebrate Carnival, an annual celebration prior to Christian Lent. Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay celebrate their independence from Spain and Uruguay from Brazil.

Concepts of personal space sometimes differ from those in the US. During conversations, regional residents often stand closer than most Americans. Men and women may interact differently than Americans are used to. For example, men shake hands both in greeting and parting, while some women may greet each other with a kiss on the cheek.

## 9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most of the Southern Cone's art, architecture, dance, music, and theater reflect the region's Roman Catholic heritage and European and indigenous influences. Some traditional art and folklore centers on the South American cowboy, the *gaucho* in Argentina and Uruguay and ***huaso*** in Chile.

Dance and music infuse daily life in the Southern Cone and influence and reflect styles from across the Caribbean and Latin America. Andean styles featuring indigenous instruments like panpipes are common in some northern regions. Other styles more clearly demonstrate European influence, such as the polkas and waltzes common throughout the region and the ***tango***, a music and dance style that emerged in Buenos Aires in the late 19th century. One traditional Paraguayan dance requires performers to balance bottles on their heads.

By far, soccer is the most popular sport across the region. Uruguay notably hosted the inaugural World Cup in 1930, and all the Southern Cone countries have had significant international success, producing players of world renown. With its *gaucho* tradition and vast ***pampas*** (treeless plains), Argentina has also achieved international preeminence in polo. Some games and sports in Chile and Paraguay are of indigenous origin.

Traditional handicrafts such as weaving, ceramics, leatherwork, and woodcarving have been revived in recent years. Paraguay's most famous handicraft is ***ñandutí*** lace, reflecting 16th-century European and Guaraní techniques. With a rich literary tradition, the region has produced writers of international influence, notably Argentina's Jorge Luis Borges, Chile's Pablo Neruda and Isabel Allende, Paraguay's Augusto Roa Bastos, and Uruguay's Eduardo Galeano, among others.

## 10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Cuisine varies across the region based on local products and tastes, though beef is universally popular. Argentina and

Uruguay lead the world in beef consumption, typically more than twice the US per capita average. Along the coasts, residents consume seafood. In Paraguay and Chile, some dishes reflect indigenous traditions, such as the varied use of corn or maize. Argentina and Chile are large wine producers with high domestic consumption. ***Maté***, an herbal beverage traditionally drunk from a gourd through a straw, is popular throughout the region.

Health in most of the region has improved in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Argentines, Chileans, and Uruguayans have access to healthcare that is subsidized by their governments, with high quality services and standards of care. Uruguay's healthcare system is especially advanced, with almost 50 physicians per 10,000 people, compared to 38 in Paraguay and the US rate of 36.

In Paraguay, few residents have health insurance, and clinics and hospitals are often ill-equipped and understaffed, particularly in rural areas. Further, Paraguay has high rates of malnutrition and low immunization rates, resulting in a notable number of preventable deaths. Noncommunicable diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease cause at least 75% of deaths in all the Southern Cone countries, though Argentina and Paraguay also experience outbreaks of communicable diseases.

## 11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

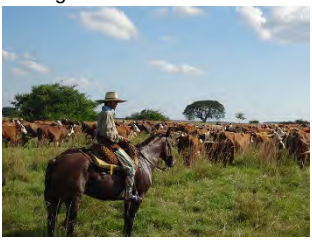
Under Spanish colonial control, regional economies focused predominantly on large agricultural estates. After 19th-century independence, Chile experienced a mining boom, and while most economies continue to rely on the export of agricultural products

today, they have become more diversified. The Southern Cone's largest economy is Argentina, followed by Chile, Uruguay, and then Paraguay.

The services sector comprises the largest part of GDP in all the countries, ranging from 63% in Uruguay to 48% in Paraguay, as of 2022. Tourism brings in significant income across the region, and Uruguay has emerged in recent decades as an important offshore banking center. Industry has seen significant growth in Paraguay, and mining continues to comprise about 14% of GDP in Chile in 2022.

Nevertheless, agriculture continues to provide most export products. For example, Argentina is one of Latin America's largest producers of grain, Paraguay is a world leader in soybean production, and livestock and associated products make up 40% of Uruguay's export income. Patagonia (a region comprising parts of Argentina and Chile) is home to about half the world's sheep, most sheared for their wool. Wheat and wine are other important agricultural products.

Paraguay tends to have the region's lowest standard of living and Uruguay the highest. Paraguay also has a large informal sector, with many residents laboring as small-scale subsistence farmers. Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay benefit from their membership in Mercosur, the Southern Common Market, a trading bloc that has signed free trade agreements with Chile, Japan, and the European Union, among others. Meanwhile, Chile has joined other international blocs, notably becoming the first South American member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2010.



As of late-2024, economic recovery is underway in the Southern Cone. While the region is still experiencing effects of the pandemic, experts expect economic growth to reach a moderate 2% in 2024.

## 12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Roads form the primary infrastructure in the region, though quality tends to deteriorate in rural areas. Argentina has one of Latin America's largest rail systems, though services have reduced in recent decades. While Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay have large container ports for sea-going vessels, landlocked Paraguay relies on river ports for access to the Atlantic Ocean.

Argentina and Chile depend predominantly on fossil fuels, and Argentina also has three nuclear reactors generating about 5% of its energy. While all the Southern Cone countries rely on hydroelectric plants, Paraguay generates all its power from hydroelectricity and is one of the world's largest exporters of electricity. By contrast, Uruguay has become a world leader in solar and wind energy, generating some 46% of its energy from such sources in 2023.

Of the Southern Cone countries, Uruguay ranks highest in a 2024 worldwide press freedom ranking. In Chile and Paraguay, press freedoms are threatened by the concentration of media ownership in a few hands. Further, to prevent them from reporting on sensitive topics, journalists in Chile occasionally face harassment and those in Paraguay face threats and violence.

Telecommunications infrastructure is generally highly developed. Paraguay has the region's lowest rates of mobile phone users at 128 subscriptions per 100 people as of 2022, compared to more than 132 in the other countries. Internet use ranges from 77% of Paraguayans to 90% of Chileans and Uruguayans.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Southern Cone society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Uruguay.

# PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

## 1. HISTORY AND MYTH

### Overview

Situated on South America's southeastern coast, Uruguay was home to several small Indigenous populations before becoming the subject of competition between the Spanish and Portuguese empires. After becoming a Spanish colony, Uruguay was briefly incorporated into what is now Brazil and then Argentina before emerging as a unitary, independent state in 1828. During much of the 19th century, Uruguay was drawn into wars involving its larger, powerful neighbors, Argentina and Brazil. Meanwhile, intense, sometimes violent, political competition between two principal political parties gripped the country until 1973, when the military seized power. Since the restoration of civil rule in 1985, Uruguay has become a stable and prosperous social democracy.

### Early History

Archeological evidence from the Uruguayan ***pampas*** (treeless plains) suggests that early hunter-gatherers first inhabited the region around 10,000 years ago. By 2000 BC, semi-nomadic peoples, including the Charrúa, Chaná, and Guaraní, resided in Uruguay. The Charrúa migrated yearly from the coast, where they fished in the summer and hunted deer and small game in the winter. Charrúa society was politically decentralized and warlike, with small villages of 10 or so families ruled by local chiefs and divided by ferocious conflict.

### Spanish Arrival

Juan Díaz de Solís, a Spanish navigator, became the first European to reach Uruguay when his efforts to discover a strait between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans brought him to the ***Río***

***de la Plata*** (River of Silver, or "River Plate") in 1516. Attacked by Indigenous warriors (Charrúa, according to legend, but more likely Guaraní), Solís and his crew were killed in an event now mythicized in Uruguayan folklore. Portuguese captain Ferdinand Magellan made brief anchor at what is now Montevideo in 1520. In 1526, British navigator Sebastian Cabot led a Spanish expedition on the *Río de la Plata*. Absent mineral wealth or major Indigenous communities that might be exploited for labor, the region proved unsuitable for settlement and largely remained undisturbed for the remainder of the 16th century.

In the early 17th century, Hernando Arias de Saavedra, a Spanish colonial Governor, shipped cattle and horses downriver from Asunción (the capital of present-day Paraguay) to graze in the *pampas* of what is today Uruguay. The cattle multiplied, and ranching would later emerge as the region's first major economic enterprise (see *Economics and Resources*). Transient bands of ***mestizo*** (mixed Spanish and Indigenous) ***gauchos*** (cowboys) hunted these herds for their hides.

In 1624, Franciscan missionary Bernardo Guzmán established Uruguay's first permanent European settlement on the coast of the Uruguay River, between the confluence of the ***Río Negro*** (Black River) and the *Río de la Plata*. Guzmán sought to introduce the Catholic faith to the Chaná of present-day southwestern Uruguay, having previously failed to convert the more violent Charrúa (see *Religion and Spirituality*). The Franciscan presence in Uruguay was small, however, and the region remained at colonial South America's religious, economic, and political periphery for much of the 17th century.

### Spanish-Portuguese Competition

Spain and Portugal vied for control of Uruguay in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Seeking to expand colonial Brazil's southern territory, the Portuguese established Colônia do Sacramento (Colonia del Sacramento in Spanish) on the *Río de la Plata*, opposite the Spanish city of Buenos Aires (now the capital of Argentina) in

January 1680. In response, Spanish General José de Garro dispatched an expeditionary force that captured the town in August. A treaty returned the settlement to Portugal in 1681, but it would change hands five times between 1705-77, as competition for control of the ***Banda Oriental*** (territories east of the Uruguay River and north of the *Río de la Plata*) continued.

To bolster its claims to the region, Spain established San Felipe de Montevideo, some 100 miles east of Colonia del Sacramento, in 1726. Encouraged by generous land grants from the Spanish Crown, including ***latifundios*** (large estates) and ***estancias*** (parcels of land used to breed livestock) in the interior, families primarily from Buenos Aires and Spain's Canary Islands settled Montevideo and its surroundings. The city grew rapidly, and given its deep natural harbor, quickly became the area's principal port and hosted Spain's southern Atlantic fleet. A ***cabildo*** (town council) assumed administrative authority.

**Colonial Economy and Society:** Montevideo became an important commercial center in the 18th century. Beef raised and slaughtered in the Uruguayan interior was exported through the city, which also served as an entry point for enslaved Africans brought to Spanish South America. Few slaves remained in Uruguay, however, as its primary industries–livestock rearing and beef salting–were not especially labor intensive, and steady immigration from Europe satisfied most of its labor demand. The society that emerged was more economically equal than those in other Spanish colonies, like Peru and Mexico. Montevideo had no nobility or major slave owners, and its comparatively small elite consisted of several families enriched by international trade, contracts with the Spanish Crown, and cattle ranching. Further, many inhabitants belonged to a relatively wealthy middle class.

Nevertheless, early Uruguayan society featured important social distinctions. Most of the elite were Spaniards (primarily Catalan, Basque, and Canarian) called ***peninsulares***. ***Criollos*** (Spanish

people born in the Americas) and *mestizos* comprised the middle class, while enslaved Africans occupied the lowest social station (see *Political and Social Relations*). Indigenous populations participated little in colonial society. Instead, many died from European diseases or were killed by the Spanish and Portuguese.


Spanish settlements proliferated across the *Banda Oriental* during the 18th century, further solidifying Spanish control of the region. In 1752, the *cabildo* established the Blandengues Corps, which it tasked to secure the frontier north of Buenos Aires. Portuguese encroachment persisted, and in 1776, Spanish King Charles III reconstituted Spain's colonial holdings, in part to control and secure Uruguay. Montevideo was incorporated into the newly established ***Virreinato del*** (Viceroyalty of) *Río de la Plata,* a new administrative state governed from Buenos Aires that comprised present-day Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, and parts of Bolivia. Although Buenos Aires was the seat of the *Virreinato*, Spanish authorities gave Montevideo privileges, like authorization to trade directly with Spanish merchants, causing a rivalry between the cities that would deepen in subsequent decades.

### British Invasion and the Government Junta of Montevideo

War between Britain and Spain during Europe's Napoleonic conflict (1803-15) provided the pretext for British action in the *Río de la Plata* region, which had long interested British authorities as a possible South American colony. After capturing and later relinquishing control of Buenos Aires, in 1807, Britain dispatched an expeditionary force to Montevideo, seizing the city after several days of close-quarters street combat. Although the British left the region under an armistice after only a few months of occupation, European affairs continued to affect Uruguay.

In 1808, French Emperor Napoleon I removed Spanish King Ferdinand VII from the throne and appointed his brother King of Spain. In response, the *cabildo* of Montevideo established the ***Junta Gubernativa de Montevideo*** (Government Junta of Montevideo), led by Governor Javier de Elío, which proclaimed

loyalty to Ferdinand. The Junta sought to establish a distinct political authority in Montevideo, separate from Buenos Aires and closely aligned to Spain's Central Junta (which functioned as a surrogate for the deposed Spanish monarchy). Although the Junta lasted only 8 months, Elío managed to retain personal control of Montevideo and rally the city's Royalist elements around himself.

### The Struggle for Independence

In 1811, Blandengues Corps Commander José Gervasio Artigas rallied forces in the interior of the *Banda Oriental* against Elío's pro-Spanish leadership in Montevideo. Artigas's army aligned with Buenos Aires (then under the direction of a *criollo* governing body that had unseated the Spanish Viceroy in 1810), achieving major victories against Royalist and Spanish forces throughout Uruguay and besieging Montevideo. Surrounded, Elío called for Portuguese aid. Forces from Brazil moved swiftly through Uruguay. Consequently, Artigas and Buenos Aires made peace with Elío, ending the siege, and Artigas withdrew from Uruguay.

After several months in Argentina, Artigas returned to Uruguay and advocated for the reorganization of political authority in the *Río de la Plata* region along federalist lines. Not only did he want to secure Uruguay's independence from Spain but also ensure that the *Banda Oriental* would be autonomous from Buenos Aires. Nevertheless, when Buenos Aires convened a constituent assembly in 1813, it refused to seat delegates from Uruguay and set out to create a unitary, centrist government that would control the *Banda Oriental*. In response, Artigas cut ties with Buenos Aires and again laid siege to Montevideo. Two years of conflict followed, involving Spanish, Argentine, and Uruguayan forces.

### The Federal League and Portuguese Annexation

By early 1815, Artigas controlled the Uruguayan countryside and Montevideo. He formally declared independence from Spain and established Uruguay's first autonomous government, which joined six provinces into the ***Liga Federal*** (Federal League). In

1816, threatened by the Federal League's growing prestige, Portugal moved its forces into Uruguay seeking to seize control from Artigas and establish the region as a province of Brazil. Though the Portuguese secured control of Montevideo in early 1817, they struggled against Artigas's forces in the interior for 3 years.

Meanwhile, in 1817, Artigas declared war on the United Provinces of *Río de la Plata* (as the centralized political entity in Buenos Aires had become known in 1816) after it rejected his appeals to unite with the Federal League. Armies commanded by Federal League Governors overcame the army of the United Provinces and brokered an agreement with Buenos Aires against Artigas's will. Nevertheless, in 1821, the Portuguese subdued the remaining Uruguayan resistance and annexed the *Banda Oriental* as the Cisplatina Province of Brazil. Artigas, who fled to Paraguay, would subsequently become a national hero in Uruguay.

**The Cisplatine War and the Oriental Republic of Uruguay**

In 1825, a group of Uruguayan revolutionaries led by Juan Antonio Lavalleja and known as the ***Treinta y Tres Orientales*** (Thirty-Three Orientals) staged an insurrection against Brazil. With Argentine assistance, Lavalleja's forces established control of the interior. In August, revolutionaries declared Uruguay's independence from Brazil and incorporation into the United Provinces, on which Brazil then declared war. The resultant conflict for control of Uruguay, known today as the Cisplatine or Argentine-Brazilian War, ground to a stalemate. While the Army of the United Provinces overcame Brazilian forces on Uruguay's *pampas*, a Brazilian blockade undermined regional commerce.

**Independence:** In 1828, at the suggestion of Britain, which held substantial trade interests in the region, Brazil and the United Provinces brokered the Treaty of Montevideo, which ended hostilities and provided for an independent Uruguayan state. As Argentine and Brazilian forces withdrew, a constituent assembly met in Montevideo. The assembly issued a Constitution that

legally founded the ***República Oriental del Uruguay*** (Oriental Republic of Uruguay), called for a two-chamber General Assembly empowered to elect a President, declared Roman Catholicism the republic's official religion (see *Religion and Spirituality*), and divided the country into nine administrative departments.

**The Early Republic**

Uruguay's beginnings were tumultuous. Political power rested primarily with local ***caudillos*** (strongmen). Three in particular–Generals José Fructuoso Rivera, Manuel Oribe, and Lavalleja–wielded the most influence and fought against each other to attain power. In 1830, Rivera became Uruguay's first President. His administration survived three rebellions organized by Lavalleja, who fled to Brazil in 1834.

**Genocide:** During this time, the government sought to rid the country of Indigenous peoples. In April 1831, the Uruguayan Army committed a genocidal attack on the Charrúa in an event now known as the Massacre of Salsipuedes. Government forces killed dozens and imprisoned or enslaved hundreds of Charrúa people at Salsipuedes (a Spanish contraction of the phrase "get out if you can") Creek in central Uruguay. This massacre almost fully eliminated Indigenous influence in the country and helped dilute it in the public's memory, furthering the government's notion that Uruguay was a nation of European heritage (see *Political and Social Relations*).

When his term ended in late 1834, Rivera backed Oribe as his successor. Upon assuming the Presidency, however, Oribe allowed Lavalleja to return to Uruguay, prompting a rivalry to develop between Oribe and Rivera and yielding Uruguay's first political parties. In 1836, Rivera's liberal urban base organized into the ***Partido Colorado*** (the Colorado, or Red, Party), while Oribe's conservative, landowning supporters formed the ***Partido Nacional*** (National Party, or PN), also known as the ***Partido Blanco*** (White Party, see *Political and Social Relations*). Rivera

moved to forcefully oust Oribe, which he managed in 1838, and subsequently was elected for a second term.

### The Great War

Thereafter, the Colorado-*Blanco* contest continued as Argentine generals backed rival Uruguayan parties. In 1842, Oribe besieged Montevideo, initiating a conflict now known as Uruguay's ***Guerra Grande*** (Great War). The siege lasted 9 years, despite British and French interventions that sought to liberate the city and restore commerce. Colorados, freed slaves, and foreign nationals (notably French and Italian soldiers) defended Montevideo as Blanco forces won control of the interior and Oribe established a separate government based in a Blanco-held part of Montevideo.

In 1851, Justo José de Urquiza, an Argentine Governor, initiated a campaign against the Blancos with support from Uruguayan troops. Urquiza prevailed in the countryside and battled to free the parts of Montevideo held by the Blancos, while Brazil offered naval and financial support to the besieged Colorados. By late 1851, the Colorados had prevailed, and the siege was lifted.

### Political Volatility, War, and Economic Growth

Uruguayan politics remained volatile after the war. Although legitimately elected Presidents intermittently held office during the 1850s, coups were constant. After removing Bernardo Berro in 1865 (Uruguay's last Blanco President for nearly a century) from office, Venancio Flores was responsible for Uruguay joining the War of the Triple Alliance (also known as the Paraguayan War). In what would be Latin America's deadliest-ever war, a coalition of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay fought and defeated Paraguay. The conflict yielded prosperity and stability for Montevideo, which became a supply depot for Brazil's Navy. Aided by foreign capital, industrial development began as Montevideo's natural harbor continued to facilitate significant international trade, and agriculture-based enterprises flourished (see *Economics and Resources*).

### Co-participation and Military Intervention

After a PN uprising from 1870-72, the Colorados and Blancos forged an agreement that created a system of ***coparticipación*** (co-participation), whereby both parties agreed to participate in government and peacefully share power. This system faltered in the mid-1870s, when a series of military leaders occupied the Presidency but was restored later during the Colorado Presidency of Julio Herrera y Obes (1890-94). In 1897, another Blanco uprising sought to undermine co-participation and remove Herrera y Obes's successor, though it failed.

### The Batlle Years

Elected President by the General Assembly in 1903, Colorado statesman José Batlle y Ordóñez dominated Uruguayan politics for nearly 2 decades and engineered the consolidation of the modern Uruguayan state. At the beginning of his term, however, another PN insurrection challenged his authority. A vicious 9-month-long civil war followed. The Colorados prevailed, and in 1904, both parties signed the Peace of Aceguá, which stabilized the nation.

Through two terms (1903-07 and 1911-15), Batlle implemented liberalizing reforms, nationalized the economy, and laid the groundwork for Uruguay's early welfare state. His administration reduced the country's dependency on imports and constructed a protectionist regime that promoted national industry while attracting foreign, especially US, capital. It also nationalized the Mortgage Bank of Uruguay (a savings and loan institution), railways, the hydrocarbons sector, introduced an 8-hour workday, unemployment compensation, and pensions (see *Economics and Resources*). Batlle also reduced the Church's role in government and introduced public secondary education (see *Learning and Knowledge*), among other measures.

Seeking to preserve his major policy adjustments against future political shifts, in 1913 Batlle proposed an institutional reform that would replace the Presidency with an executive body called

the ***colegiado*** (collegiate). The proposal was controversial, and the Colorado Party split into pro- and anti-*colegiado* factions. In 1917, Uruguay held elections for a constituent assembly that would promulgate a new Constitution and settle the *colegiado* issue. The pro-*colegiado* camp fared poorly, but the Colorados won a majority. The resulting Constitution not only codified many Batlle-era reforms but was a compromise that divided executive authority between a new ***Consejo Nacional de Administración*** (National Council of Administration, or CNA) and the President.

### Party Politics and Stability

In the 1920s, the Colorado electoral advantage was consistent but small, and the memory of somewhat recent civil conflict motivated efforts to improve the stability of Uruguay's electoral democracy. In 1924, the government established an electoral court to manage elections. Party politics diversified during this period as splinter parties emerged. Although Batlle remained influential the reorganization of political power made it difficult for the Batllists to implement their reformist agenda.

### The Terra Dictatorship

In 1931, Colorado candidate Gabriel Terra was elected President. Moving to fill the post-Batlle void, he governed until 1933, when he initiated a self-coup with support from PN leaders, dissolving both the General Assembly and the CNA. As Dictator, Terra suppressed dissidents, deported opposition leaders, and implemented strict press censorship laws. He also organized elections for a constituent assembly, which produced a new Constitution in 1934 that eliminated the CNA, returning its powers to the President. It also provided for additional reforms and extended suffrage to women (see *Sex and Gender*).

During his tenure, Terra promoted laws that made it impossible for his political rivals to threaten his rule by institutional means, and an effort to unite dissident Colorado and Blanco opposition

into a unified "popular front" failed. In the name of economic restoration following the Great Depression (see *Economics and Resources*), Terra reversed many Batlle-era policies, interfering with labor unions, limiting nationalization, and undermining the monopolies that existed in already nationalized industries. In 1938, Uruguay held its first general elections under the 1934 Constitution, and Terra's brother-in-law, General Alfredo Baldomir, became President.

### Prosperity and Social Development

At the outset of World War II, Baldomir declared Uruguay neutral but later established close ties to the Allies (Britain, France, the US, and the Soviet Union, among others). The war proved beneficial for Uruguay, as US and European demand for Uruguayan meat, wool, and hides grew, and its manufacturing sector developed substantially. In 1942, Colorado candidate Juan José de Amézaga was elected President, and a new Constitution that restored the General Assembly, among other measures, was enacted by referendum.

Amézaga restored civil liberties undermined by Terra and sought to improve the welfare state. He implemented wage councils, created a family assistance program, and extended the pension system in 1943. Two years later, the General Assembly passed legislation requiring paid leave. These developments coincided with a period of increasing wealth for Uruguay. From 1945-55, rising industrial production contributed to a near-doubling of national output. National gold reserves grew, and foreign indebtedness declined. Further, Luis Batlle Berres, nephew of José Batlle y Ordóñez and President from 1947-51, implemented protectionist policies, creating an interventionist economic regime that subsidized agriculture and industry. Owing to its extensive social welfare provisions and growing wealth, Uruguay became known as the "Switzerland of South America" during this period.

## Economic Decline and the Blanco Administrations

After the Korean War ended in 1953, American demand for wool, one of Uruguay's major exports, dropped significantly. Prices of agricultural products fell, and a series of major strikes organized by increasingly powerful unions undermined production. By the end of the 1950s, the electorate had become unhappy with the Colorados–then split into factions–and their inadequate efforts to normalize the economy. As a result, the Blancos returned to power in 1959 after nearly a century of Colorado dominance.

From 1959-67, PN governments administered Uruguay. Catering to their agricultural and ranching base, the Blancos sought to reverse the pro-industry protectionist policies of the previous decades that had undermined Uruguayan farm exports. These market-oriented reforms were poorly implemented, however, and inflation and banking crises gripped the country by 1965 (see *Economics and Resources*). In 1966, several constitutional amendments passed with Blanco and Colorado support, yielding a new Constitution that expanded executive authority, extended the presidential term from 4 to 5 years and removed the procedural remains of electoral co-participation.

## The Military Dictatorship

Meanwhile, amidst the economic turmoil, the ***Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaros*** (the National Liberation Movement-Tupamaros), a Marxist guerilla organization, initiated an urban insurgency. In response, the government called on the military to counter the Tupamaros in late 1971. Within 6 months, extensive security operations had both subdued the Tupamaros and brought the military into the political arena. When a conflict emerged between the Armed Forces and the General Assembly, in June 1973, President Juan María Bordaberry dissolved the legislature and enabled the Armed Forces and police to fill the political vacuum. The result was a *de facto* military dictatorship.

The brutally repressive regime either tortured or imprisoned thousands of Uruguayans suspected of dissent. In 1976, Uruguay had the world's highest rate of per-capita political prisoners. During the dictatorship, 197 Uruguayans disappeared (most of them in Argentina), hundreds were killed in extra-judicial killings, and around 380,000 (over 12% of the population) fled the country. The regime also dissolved unions, assumed control of the media, and sought to accumulate foreign capital at the expense of residents' wages.

In 1977, the government proposed a plan that would further consolidate its control, purging the Colorado and Blanco parties and proposing a Constitution that would create single-candidate elections. In 1980, the proposed Constitution was put to referendum. In a result revealing surging opposition, some 57% of Uruguayans rejected the proposal, undermining the regime's legitimacy. Thereafter, political dialogue began to return to Uruguay.

**Transition to Democracy:** Dire economic conditions caused by banking deregulation, growing debt, and external pressures forced the régime to engage with citizens after 1982, especially as major strikes proliferated throughout the country (see *Economics and Resources*). Meetings between the military, the Colorados, and several smaller political parties, including those on the political left, resulted in the Naval Club Pact, which called for national elections in November 1984. With the inauguration of Colorado President Julio María Sanguinetti the subsequent March, Uruguay's democracy was restored.

### Democratic Consolidation and Economic Crisis

Calls to hold military leaders accountable for their crimes were widespread, but Sanguinetti opted to sponsor general amnesty. He also did little to improve the economy. As a result, Colorados fared poorly in the 1989 presidential election, which Blanco Luis Alberto Lacalle won. Lacalle prioritized economic normalization. He joined the Southern Common Market (known by its Spanish-

language abbreviation, Mercosur, an economic and political bloc also comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Venezuela, suspended in 2016), which contributed to substantial economic growth. He also proposed privatization that proved unpopular.

The 1994 elections resulted in a three-way split between the Colorados, Blancos, and the ***Frente Amplio*** (Broad Front, or FA, see *Political and Social Relations*), a leftist coalition. Sanguinetti eventually won the Presidency again and oversaw a constitutional amendment in 1996 that simplified procedures for presidential elections and invited increased political participation beyond the Colorado-Blanco spectrum. Nevertheless, the Colorados retained the Presidency in 2000, when Jorge Batlle Ibáñez, great nephew of José Batlle y Ordóñez, was elected.

Meanwhile, the devaluation of Brazil's currency and Argentina's Great Depression (1998-2002) caused an economic and social crisis in Uruguay, whose economy shrank for 5 consecutive years until 2003 (see *Economics and Resources*). Although the government adeptly managed the crisis with the help of an emergency loan from the US, poverty more than doubled, and the event left a great impact on Uruguay. The country not only sought to lessen its dependence on its larger neighbors but also looked for political alternatives.

### Contemporary Politics

In 2005, Uruguay's first left-wing President, Tabaré Vázquez, assumed office. His broad coalition, created as the FA absorbed two independent progressive parties, also won a majority in the General Assembly. Vázquez implemented economic reforms, expanded social programs, and investigated the military regime's crimes. The FA retained the Presidency in 2009 with the election of José Mujica, a former Tupamaro guerrilla. During Mujica's term, the country prospered, and the General Assembly annulled Sanguinetti's amnesty law after the Inter-American Court of Human Rights declared it in conflict with an international human

rights convention. Mujica's government investigated the dictatorship's crimes, though progress slowed after the Supreme Court declared part of the annulment unconstitutional in 2013.

Vázquez returned to the Presidency in 2015 and presided over a slowing economy and increasing drug-trafficking-related violence. His bid to combat drug activity by legalizing marijuana–and therefore undermining illegal drug revenue–was widely unpopular, and Uruguay's relations with the US Drug Enforcement Administration became strained as the Port of Montevideo became an important outlet for cocaine trafficking to Europe. These conditions caused support for the opposition to surge. As a result, the FA's grasp on the electorate slipped, and the 2019 election was sent to a runoff after FA candidate Daniel Martínez failed to secure a majority. With the opposition united against Martínez in the runoff, Blanco candidate Luis Lacalle Pou, son of former President Luis Alberto Lacalle, was elected President.

Today, popular initiatives are an increasingly critical component of Uruguayan politics. Three efforts are underway to bypass legislative channels and force constitutional reform by referendum. The first, sponsored by a federation of unions, seeks to reverse elements of a pension reform implemented by Lacalle Pou in 2023. The second, sponsored by a right-wing political party, *Cabildo* ***Abierto*** (Open Town Council), seeks to boost the government's role in credit markets. The third, led by ***Movimiento Uruguay Soberano*** (Sovereign Uruguay Movement), intends to require more transparency in state contracts and making calling special votes easier. Though the likelihood that these efforts yield constitutional reform is low, they indicate surging discontent and populism currently confined to legal channels. They also signal a degree of dissatisfaction with the Lacalle Pou Administration.

## Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Contemporary Uruguayan myths and legends combine elements of Indigenous mythology with heroic narratives of resistance to Spanish and Portuguese rule.

**The Ombú Tree:** The Guaraní legend of the ombú, or ***Iajua*** in the Guaraní language, tells the creation story of the large trees scattered across Uruguay's *pampas* (see *Economics and Resources*). The story begins with ***Tupã*** (supreme God) creating plants and granting them wishes. He gave the quebracho tree hard wood and the jacaranda lilac flowers, while others asked for fragrance and fruit. However, the ombú did not want these things. Instead, it wished for soft bark and a large canopy to cast shade and protection over animals and humans. *Tupã* was touched by the tree's wisdom and selflessness, and in return granted it immortality. In the 17th century, ombú trees became a symbol of *gaucho* culture, as those traveling through the *pampas* could spot them and seek shelter underneath their branches.

Today, Uruguay is home to some of the oldest and largest ombú trees, which can live for over 500 years under difficult conditions.

**The Timbó Tree:** Another Guaraní legend describes the timbó tree's creation and its uniquely shaped fruit. The story describes a king named Saguaá, who ruled over his tribe with his daughter Tacuareé. One day, Tacuareé left her father's tribe to be with a man from another village, saddening Saguaá. After months passed without hearing from his daughter, Saguaá set out to find her but arrived at the village to find it in ruins and abandoned. Saguaá placed his ear to the ground, hoping to hear his daughter's footsteps. He stayed in this position for so long that he died, and his body could not be moved. Over time, on the ground where Saguaá passed, a large tree grew, bearing fruit resembling his ear. Today, the timbó tree's fruit represents Saguaá's ear and his endless love and search for Tacuareé.

# 2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

## Official Name

Oriental Republic of Uruguay
***República Oriental del Uruguay*** (Spanish)

## Political Borders

Argentina: 336 mi
Brazil: 652 mi
Coastline: 410 mi


## Capital

Montevideo

## Demographics

Uruguay's population of about 3.42 million is growing at an annual rate of around 0.27%. Some 96% of the population lives in urban areas. Half of residents live in or around the capital and most populous city, Montevideo. Generally, the population concentrates in the South and in cities along the borders with Argentina and Brazil.

## Flag

Adopted in 1828 after gaining independence from Brazil (see *History and Myth*), the original Uruguayan flag had 9 blue and 10 white stripes. Since 1830, the flag has featured nine equal alternating horizontal stripes of white (top and bottom) and blue. A white square in the upper hoist-side corner features the 16-ray ***Sol de Mayo*** (Sun of May), which represents the sun shining through the clouds during the region's calls for independence from Spain in 1810 (see *History and Myth*). The sun's face symbolizes ***Inti***, the Inca sun god, and its rays alternate between triangular and wavy. The nine stripes represent the country's original geopolitical divisions into nine distinct departments (see "Government" below).

## Geography

Uruguay is South America's second smallest country (after Suriname). Uruguay borders Argentina to the west, Brazil to the north and northeast, the South Atlantic Ocean to the southeast and south, and the ***Río de la Plata*** (River of Silver, or "River Plate") estuary to the southwest. Nearly the size of Missouri, Uruguay's total land area is around 67,573 sq mi.

Uruguay is a relatively flat, fertile country (see *Economics and Resources*) that primarily features gently rolling hills and plains. The Haedo Ridge in the North and Grande Ridge in the Southeast feature some of Uruguay's highest elevations and are a topographic transition from Argentina's lowlands to Brazil's highlands. Mt. Cathedral near the southeastern coast is the country's highest point (1,685 ft). Low plateaus, hills, broad valleys, and fertile treeless plains known as the Pampas comprise most of the country.

While Uruguay has an abundance of water, no major rivers flow entirely within the country. The Uruguay River (1,000 mi) forms part of the border between Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay and empties into the *Río de la Plata* between Uruguay and Argentina. The Paraná River, South America's second longest (3,032 mi), also empties into the *Río de la Plata* but otherwise does not pass through Uruguay. The ***Río Negro*** (Black River, 466 mi) begins in the Brazilian highlands and bisects Uruguay. Near the center of the country, a dam on the river forms the ***Rincón del Bonete*** reservoir, Uruguay's largest freshwater lake (480 sq mi). In its northeast, Uruguay shares ***Lago Merín*** (***Lagoa Mirim*** in Portuguese), a vast brackish lagoon (1,146 sq mi), with Brazil. The country's coastline is dotted with lagoons, sand dunes, and sandy beaches.

## Climate

Uruguay has a warm temperate climate with well-defined winter (June-August) and summer (December-February) seasons. The country's northern interior tends to be warmer than the southern

coast. The average summer and winter temperatures in Montevideo (coast) are 72 °F and 50 °F, compared to 79 °F and 54 °F in Salto (interior). Generally, while freezing temperatures are rare, summers are hot. Rain is common throughout the year but heaviest in the fall (especially in March/April). Uruguay tends to receive more rainfall in the North than the South, with average precipitation of 63 in and 40 in per year, respectively.

### Natural Hazards

Uruguay is vulnerable to river, urban, and coastal floods, as well as wildfires, and to a lesser extent, extreme heat. In early 2022, a flash flood occurred in and around Montevideo after nearly 6 in of rain fell in 1 hour, causing property damage and hundreds of people to evacuate their homes. The flood came after record-breaking temperatures that reached 109 °F struck the area. After a drought caused by a La Niña climatic phenomenon, Uruguay experienced its worst-ever wildfires in 2024. Extreme temperatures affected much of the country but especially the Northwest near Salto and Paysandú.

### Environmental Issues

Human practices and climate pattern changes have degraded Uruguay's natural environment, resulting in waterway and drinking water pollution, harmful emissions, habitat deterioration, among other issues. Agricultural and industrial runoff, primarily from sources like farms and factories, have polluted waterways and drinking water. Toxic levels of lead have poisoned people in Montevideo, largely due to industrial pollution. In a 2024 environmental performance index, Uruguay ranked 98 out of 180 countries, lower than the US (34), Brazil (48) and Argentina (81).

### Government

Uruguay is a unitary presidential republic that divides into 19 ***Departamentos*** (Departments) led by ***Intendentes*** (Governors) and ***Juntas Departamentales*** (Departmental Boards), each of which comprise 31 ***Ediles*** (Councilors). The *Departamentos* subdivide into 127 ***Municipios*** (Municipalities) led by ***Alcaldes***

(Mayors) and ***Concejales*** (Councilors). Residents vote in elections every 5 years, with simultaneous departmental and municipal elections held most recently in late 2020. Elections for President and the national legislature occur 1 year before the local elections and were held most recently in 2019. Uruguay's current Constitution was passed in 1966, implemented in 1967, and last amended in 2004 (see *History and Myth*). Its 332 articles cover citizen rights like freedom of religion, press, and assembly. It also provides procedural regulations that govern the country's democratic institutions.

### Executive Branch

The current President, Luis Lacalle Pou, was elected in 2019 and took office in 2020 (see *History and Myth*). The President is head-of-state and government and serves as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The President also appoints military commanders, diplomats, the Attorney General, and the 13 members of the Council of Ministers (cabinet). In addition, the President is responsible for nominating Supreme Court Justices, negotiating treaties, preparing the budget, and may declare war and states of emergency. In a close vote in 2024, Uruguay elected Yamandú Ramón Antonio Orsi Martínez of the left-leaning Broad Front party, who will take office in 2025.

The President and Vice President (VP) are directly elected by an absolute majority vote for 5-year terms, with multiple nonconsecutive terms allowed. If a candidate does not receive a majority in the initial round of voting, a run-off is held. Elected in 2019, Uruguay's VP is Beatriz Argimón, whose formal role is to succeed the President in case of death, incapacity, resignation, or other reasons to leave office. The VP is also President of the ***Asamblea General*** (General Assembly).

### Legislative Branch

Located at the Legislative Palace in Montevideo, the *Asamblea General* is a 2-chamber legislature comprising a 30-seat Senate and 99-seat Chamber of Representatives. Senators are directly elected in a

single nationwide election by proportional representation vote. Representatives are elected in multi-seat elections by proportional representation vote based on party affiliation, with at least two members from each department. Neither chamber has term limits. The *Asamblea* controls most legislative powers, such as lawmaking, imposing taxes, and approving treaties. Initiated by the Chamber of Representatives and carried out by the Senate, the *Asamblea* has the power to impeach the President, VP, Cabinet Ministers, and Supreme Court Justices.

### Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes the ***Suprema Corte de Justicia*** (Supreme Court of Justice), Courts of Appeal, District Courts, Peace Courts, and Rural Courts, among others. As the highest court, the Supreme Court is an appellate court that reviews lower-court decisions as well as appointing and overseeing all other judges. The Supreme Court's five members are nominated by the President and appointed by a two-thirds vote in a joint session of the *Asamblea*. Justices serve 10-year terms, with reelection possible after a lapse of 5 years following the previous term and mandatory retirement at age 75.

### Political Climate

Uruguay's political structure widely ranks as one of the world's fairest. In 2024, Uruguay had a higher score than all other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), tying with Japan and Slovenia in a global freedom index that rates people's access to political and civil rights. The country has several dominant political parties that typically govern as part of coalitions, and rival parties can gain power through elections. Uruguay has universal and compulsory suffrage for citizens aged 18 and older.

From 2005-2020, Uruguay's ruling party was the ***Frente Amplio*** (Broad Front), a coalition of left-wing parties that presided over significant social advancement and economic growth (see *History and Myth*). In 2020, the ***Coalición Multicolor*** (Multicolor Coalition) comprising the center-right ***Partido Nacional*** (National Party), centrist ***Partido Colorado*** (Colorado Party),

far-right ***Cabildo Abierto*** (Open Town Council), right-wing ***Partido de la Gente*** (Party of the People), and center-left ***Partido Independiente*** (Independent Party) took power. President Lacalle Pou, of the *Partido Nacional*, won just under 51% of the vote, while the *Coalición Multicolor* together won 56 Chamber and 17 Senate seats. As of 2024, seven parties have representatives in the *Asamblea Nacional*.

Since emerging from a military dictatorship that ended in 1985 (see *History and Myth*), Uruguayan politics generally have been stable, and the country has achieved steady progress on an array of political, economic, and social issues. President Lacalle Pou's government has sought to provide citizens greater freedom, shrink the budget while preserving educational and health programs, and reform pensions. It has pursued business-friendly policies, such as free trade agreements as well as support for startups and entrepreneurs. Moreover, Uruguay's politics are generally free and fair. In a 2023 corruption perceptions index, Uruguay ranked 16 of 180 countries, tied with Belgium and Japan, better than the US (tied for 24), and LAC's best score, ahead of Barbados (tied for 24) and Chile (29).

Nevertheless, Uruguay faces various challenges. Trade unions and inefficient state monopolies have hindered some economic reforms and increased business costs (see *Economics and Resources*). Uruguayans increasingly have a pessimistic view of the economy, which many consider stagnant. Rates of violent and organized crime have risen in recent years as the security situation has deteriorated. Moreover, key members of the President's government have resigned from office or been sentenced for corruption. The public's response to these events and President Lacalle Pou's consistent approval rating of just below 50% enabled the Broad Front victory in 2024.

## Defense

The ***Fuerzas Armadas de Uruguay*** (Armed Forces of Uruguay)

are a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air branches, with a joint strength of about 21,100 active-duty troops. Military operations mainly focus on assuring sovereignty, territorial integrity, and protecting strategic resources. Uruguay and Argentina have a joint peacekeeping unit and conduct exercises together. The country also has military ties with the US and signed a defense-cooperation agreement with Russia in 2018 and China in 2022. At 18 years old, Uruguayans may enlist in the Armed Forces, and, while the country currently does not have conscription, the government reserves the right to conscript residents for service during emergencies.

**Army:** As the largest branch, the Army consists of some 13,500 active-duty troops organized into 4 region/division headquarters with 8 maneuver battalions (including mechanized and light) and 1 air maneuver battalion. For combat support, the Army has 1 strategic reserve artillery regiment, 5 field artillery groups, 1 engineer brigade, 4 combat engineer battalions, and 1 signals brigade. It also has and 1 air defense group.

**Navy:** The Navy comprises about 5,000 active-duty personnel who divide into a Fleet Command, Coast Guard, Materiel Directorate, and Personnel Directorate. The Naval Infantry has 1 amphibious maneuver battalion, and Naval Aviation includes maritime patrol, search and rescue/transport helicopter, transport/training, and training squadrons/flights.

**Air Force:** Composed of around 2,600 active-duty personnel, the Air Force comprises the following squadrons: 1 fighter/ground attack; 1 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); 2 transport (and 1 flight); 2 training; and 1 transport helicopter.

**Gendarmerie and Paramilitary:** Reporting to the Ministry of the Interior, the 1,400-member ***Guardia Republicana*** (Republican Guard) is a special forces body of the National Police whose mission is to guarantee, maintain, and restore internal order and combat crime.

# URUGUAY

## Uruguayan Air Force (FAU)

Major General | Brigadier General | Colonel

Lieutenant Colonel | Major | Captain

2nd Lieutenant | Lieutenant | 1st Lieutenant | Sergeant Major

Master Sergeant | Sergeant | Corporal | Private 1st Class

## Security Issues

**Crime:** In recent years, violent crime has been Uruguay's most pressing security issue. In 2022, the homicide rate per 100,000 residents was 11.2, compared to 4.3 in Argentina, 20.6 in Brazil, and 6.4 in the US. While the homicide rate was down from a peak of 12.3 in 2018, it is well above the average rate of 9.4 between 2013-22. Crime is most prevalent in the Montevideo, Canelones, and Rivera departments.

Drug trafficking (primarily cocaine destined for Europe) through Montevideo's port has contributed to rising violence. In addition to homicides, armed robberies, car jackings, and thefts are common throughout the country, but especially in large urban areas. Crime is often opportunistic. Criminals typically travel in pairs on motorbikes, approaching unsuspecting victims to demand personal belongings. Innocent bystanders are sometimes victimized during armed robberies.

**Prisoners and Females:** Inhumane prison conditions and insufficient protections for girls and women (see *Sex and Gender*) are also causes for concern. While conditions vary by prison, many facilities are overcrowded and have unsanitary conditions, poor medical and social care, and high rates of violence. The number of prisoners has increased steadily in recent years, far surpassing capacity. In 2023, 17 inmates were murdered while in custody. Likewise, women and girls face unequal treatment. In 2023, at least 21 women and girls were murdered due to their gender (see *Sex and Gender*). The government has failed to fully implement laws designed to increase women's position in society, leading to their insecurity.

Apart from these issues, Uruguay has no major internal or external conflicts, and the threat of terrorism is low. While residents have staged large-scale protests, primarily in Montevideo, most demonstrations are peaceful. However, many victims of the military dictatorship have not received justice (see *History and Myth*).

## Foreign Relations

Generally, Uruguay maintains constructive relations with many countries, especially those in LAC and Europe. Uruguay is a member of international political, economic, and peace organizations like the United Nations (UN), World Bank, World Trade Organization, World Health Organization, and International Monetary Fund. Uruguay is also an active member of regional organizations like the Organization of American States and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. The country has traditionally been among the top 20 contributors of uniformed (military and police) peacekeepers to UN peacekeeping operations and the largest contributor among countries in LAC. It has aided in missions to improve security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Golan Heights (land controlled by Israel and Syria), among other locations.

Uruguay is a member of the Southern Common Market, known by its Spanish-language abbreviation, Mercosur, an economic and political bloc. Founded in 1991, Mercosur also includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Venezuela (suspended in 2016), as well as various other associate members. As of 2023, members' combined GDP was well over US $3 trillion, making Mercosur one of the world's largest economic blocs. Nevertheless, Mercosur has become weaker in recent years, largely due to protectionism, a stalled trade deal with the European Union, internal squabbling, and Uruguay pursuing relatively independent trade and economic policies (see *History and Myth*).

**Relations with Argentina:** Since Uruguay declared the country part of the United Provinces of *Río de la Plata* (the predecessor to Argentina) in 1825 prior to achieving independence from Brazil in 1828, the two nations have maintained largely positive, peaceful relations. Uruguay and Argentina share close historical

and cultural ties. Both countries were part of Spain's Viceroyalty of *Río de la Plata* (see *History and Myth*). Their people share similar heritage (see "Ethnic Groups" below) while speaking a common Spanish dialect (see *Language and Communication*), and their economies are closely linked.

In 1973, Uruguay and Argentina signed a treaty establishing their maritime jurisdictions, also covering islands, in the *Río de la Plata*. In 2006, Argentina sued Uruguay in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), claiming that planned pulp mills in Fray Bentos on the Uruguay River would adversely affect the river environment. In 2010, the ICJ ruled that while Uruguay had failed to negotiate with Argentina over the mills, the plants posed no threat to the waterway and could keep operating. Since then, Uruguay and Argentina have maintained stable relations, though Uruguay has sought to avoid economic risk by becoming less reliant on Argentina's unstable economy (see *Economics and Resources*).

**Relations with Brazil:** In 1821, Portugal (the colonial power that governed Brazil until it became an independent country in 1822) annexed Uruguay, which became part of Brazil until 1828 (see *History and Myth*). Since then, Uruguayan relations with Brazil have improved, with a few exceptions. Today, the countries still dispute over ***Isla Brasilera*** (Brazilian Island) in the Uruguay River and the land of ***Rincón de Artigas*** (Corner of Artigas), a 91-sq-mi area between northern Uruguay and southern Brazil.

The countries also maintain close economic and political relations as well as having signed agreements on defense, trade, and technology, among other areas. In recent years, bilateral trade has grown significantly. As of 2022, Brazil was Uruguay's second largest trading partner after China (see *Economics and Resources*).

**Relations with China:** Uruguay's relations with China have grown significantly in recent years and focus primarily on

economic ties. In 2018, the countries signed a memorandum of understanding regarding Uruguay's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative, a global infrastructure development strategy. In 2023, China recognized Uruguay as a comprehensive strategic partner, one of its highest levels of diplomatic recognition. Presidents Lacalle Pou and Xi Jinping also have agreed to pursue a free trade association that Uruguay seeks to extend to Mercosur.

**Relations with the US:** The US established diplomatic relations with Uruguay in 1867. The countries share robust ties, in part due to shared values, such as a commitment to democracy, economic growth, the rule of law, labor rights, environmental protection, and the multilateral global system. The US is one of Uruguay's largest trading partners, and the countries exchange diverse goods, such as citrus and beef, and services like software. The US also provides Uruguay security assistance, particularly focused on combatting drugs, human, and goods trafficking; counterterrorism efforts; and disaster response capabilities. Uruguay and the US also have various educational and cultural exchanges.

## Ethnic Groups

According to the country's most recent census in 2023 about 85% of Uruguayans identify as primarily white, 7% black, and just over 2% Indigenous, with the remainder divided among Asian, none, or other. Uruguay is one of LAC's most ethnically homogenous countries, as most residents descend from Europeans (primarily Spaniards and Italians, with fewer British, French, Germans, Portuguese, and others). Some Uruguayans with Spanish or Portuguese descent trace their heritage to the colonial era (see *History and Myth*), while many who have other European backgrounds descend from immigrants who moved to Uruguay in the 19th or 20th centuries (see *History and Myth*).

Many Uruguayans of African descent, or Afro-Uruguayans, have ancestors who were initially enslaved by Europeans and brought to Argentina, Brazil, or Uruguay primarily during the late 18th and early 19th centuries (see *History and Myth*). Because Uruguay's early economy was not based on labor-centric plantations like in many other regions of LAC, many enslaved Africans worked as domestic servants or day laborers until slavery was gradually abolished in the mid-19th century. Despite their robust participation in the wars of independence, Afro-Uruguayans remained marginalized for most of history. Today, the country's estimated 190,000-300,000 Afro-Uruguayans primarily live in Montevideo or near the border with Brazil.

Before European conquerors arrived in Uruguay, the region was home to the Charrúa and various other Indigenous groups (see *History and Myth*). While many Charrúa peoples died of disease during the early colonial era, President Fructuoso Rivera led a genocide against the country's Indigenous peoples in 1831 (see *History and Myth*). Most Charrúa were killed, though some men escaped, and some women and children were enslaved. Today, some Uruguayans claim ***mestizo*** (mixed Indigenous and European) heritage, though few Indigenous people remain in the country.

Like Argentina and the US, Uruguay was historically a country of immigrants, as nearly 20% of the population was born abroad at the turn of the 20th century. In recent decades, immigration to Uruguay declined rapidly, until the past few years. From 2019-23, the Venezuelan population tripled to about 33,000, and nearly 30,000 Cubans arrived during the same period. Many of these migrants have fled political and economic turmoil in their countries, seeking refuge in relatively rich and stable Uruguay. Other migrants are primarily from other South American countries, like Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. As of 2023, about 3% of the population was foreign-born, up from 2% a decade before, and the first increase since 1908.

## Social Relations

Like in other Spanish colonies, early Uruguay had a strict, hierarchical class- and race-based system that continues to influence its society (see *History and Myth*). Historically, official policy encouraged immigration from Europe. Today, Uruguayan society divides along ethnic, rural-urban, and rich-poor lines. Europeans and their descendants control much of the country.

In recent years, Uruguay has become increasingly urbanized (see *Family and Kinship*), with residents moving from the rural interior to cities and towns on the coast and border regions. While nearly all rural Uruguayans have gained access to basic services such as electricity, sanitation services, and safe drinking water, in recent years, access to education, health, and other services is often more difficult in remote interior parts of the country. Migration from rural areas to cities has also resulted in the development of ***cantegriles*** (shantytowns, see *Family and Kinship*). Consequently, rural Uruguayans and many of those who recently moved to cities face more hardships than others.

In large part due to its robust welfare state and homogenous populace, Uruguay has South America's largest middle class as a percentage of the population, at about 60%. Measured by the national poverty line, the poverty rate was around 10% in 2022, though some groups, like Afro-Uruguayans and children, experience much higher poverty rates.

As of 2022, Uruguay is one of Latin America's most equal countries. However, while citizens have legal equality, significant disparities persist. Black and Indigenous Uruguayans, and women (see *Sex and Gender*) often receive unfair treatment and are underrepresented in political and business institutions. Despite a 2013 affirmative action law meant to address inequality among Afro-Uruguayans, they still experience high unemployment and economic hardships.

# 3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

## Overview

Uruguay's population is predominantly Christian. According to a 2023 survey, some 37% of residents identify as Christian (37% Roman Catholic and 5% Evangelist and Protestant), 48% as unaffiliated (including those who identify as atheist and agnostic), and less than 10% follow other religious traditions, such as Umbanda, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others.

Uruguay's Constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) guarantees freedom of worship and prohibits the government from supporting "any particular religion." Religious discrimination is illegal. Despite extensive disagreement over the meaning of the government's official commitment to secularism, Uruguay is Latin America's most secular country.

## Early Religion

Before the arrival of European ***Conquistadores*** (Conquerors, see *History and Myth*), early inhabitants of the region, such as the Charrúa, lived along the northern ***pampas*** (treeless plains) of the ***Río de la Plata*** (River of Silver, or "River Plate") in Uruguay. Scholars know little about the Charrúa culture and their religious beliefs due to a lack of written sources and genocide (see *History and Myth*). However, some believe that this fierce warrior culture practiced funerary rituals, like using the skulls of their fallen enemies as ceremonial drinking cups.

The Guaraní peoples, who were based primarily in Paraguay but often transited Uruguay (see *History and Myth*), practiced animisitic pantheism, meaning that they believed god, or divinity, lived in every aspect of the natural world, including animals, plants, and water. Because Guaraní peoples divide into many diverse groups, their beliefs, legends, and even their creation myths, differ. Regardless of their specific beliefs, shamans

provided guidance and protection by interpreting dreams and deciding spirits' intent. The Guaraní also used ayahuasca, a psychedelic brew made from native plants that causes hallucinations, for some spiritual ceremonies.

**Arrival of Christianity:** In the 16th century, Spanish colonizers introduced Christianity to Uruguay. However, the Indigenous peoples fiercely resisted Spanish conquest, often engaging in armed conflicts to deter the Spaniards from establishing permanent settlements. Exposure to diseases and notable bloodshed greatly diminished the already relatively small Indigenous population in the region. Furthermore, Uruguay's lack of minerals compared to other colonies slowed Spanish colonization and evangelization throughout the 17th century.

In the 18th century, the Jesuits, a Catholic order, began building settlements for indigenous peoples (see *History and Myth*). In 1745, they built the first primary school in Montevideo to educate indigenous Uruguayans in Roman Catholicism (see *Learning and Knowledge*). However, after the Spanish King's expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767, the Franciscans (another Catholic order) took over the responsibility of evangelization. The Franciscan convent in Montevideo became the region's cultural center, and the Franciscans remained the primary organizers of religion until the end of the colonial period, as more religious schools opened.

### Religion in the 19th Century

After Uruguay gained independence from Brazil in 1828 (see *History and Myth*), the Constitution of 1830 made Catholicism the official state religion. Although all the country's leaders were Catholic, an influx of immigrants, primarily from Spain and Italy, but among them British, French, and Germans (see *Political and Social Relations*), brought 19th-century ideas of liberalism and an anti-clerical sentiment to the country. In 1831, President Rivera limited the Church's influence and missionary efforts, particularly as he led the genocide of the Charrúa.

Throughout the 19th century, European immigrants continued to secularize the country as their progressive ideologies led many residents to question the role that Catholicism played as the official state religion. Likewise, political instability resulted in the government seeking to consolidate power by reducing the Church's authority (see *History and Myth*). Despite this secularization and its membership stagnating, the Roman Catholic Church established the Diocese of Montevideo in 1878.

### Religion in the 20th Century

During the early 20th century, President José Batlle y Ordóñez (1903-07 and 1911-15, see *History and Myth*) sought to create a secular state without an official religion by promoting religious tolerance and removing all religious imagery from public life. His government removed crucifixes from public hospitals and banned religious education in public schools (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Thereafter, the Constitution of 1919 officially separated church and state, and Uruguay renamed all religious holidays to strip them of their religious association. For example, Christmas became "Family Day" and the ***Semana Santa*** (Holy Week) of Easter became "Tourism Week," though many Uruguayans continued to refer to these holidays by their original names.

While Uruguay continued to secularize between the 1930s-60s, Pope John XIII (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church) declared ***Nuestra Señora de los Treinta y Tres*** (Our Lady of the Thirty-Three) the Patron Saint of Uruguay in 1961. The Virgin Mary (Mother of Jesus Christ) had become a symbol for Uruguayan independence in 1825, when 33 patriots proclaimed the country a liberated nation at the foot of a small, wooden carving of Mary. Indigenous Uruguayans created the statue under the guidance of 18th-century missionaries. Ever since, the image that became known as ***La Virgen de los Treinta y Tres*** has held particular significance in Uruguayan culture (see *History and Myth*).

During the 1970s-80s, Uruguay fell under the control of a military dictatorship that committed numerous human rights violations (see *History and Myth*). While the Church criticized the authoritarian government, it failed to significantly protect or speak out in support of many oppressed peoples. Consequently, Protestantism emerged as a religious alternative whose members staunchly opposed the military government and encouraged values like democracy and freedom. Likewise, during the 1990s, various other religions gained popularity. One such creed was Umbanda, a syncretic (mixed) faith that developed in Brazil, which emphasizes reincarnation and racial democracy.

### Religion Today

Although many Uruguayans identify as members of the Roman Catholic Church, few actively practice the faith. Only about 28% of Uruguayans say that religion is especially important to them, 29% pray daily, and 13% attend weekly services. Instead, many Uruguayans identify as ***ningunas*** (nones) who do not profess any religion. Many *ningunas* are young people, who consider the Roman Catholic Church's views on social issues, such as same-sex marriage and abortion, outdated (see *Sex and Gender*). Likewise, some 306,000 residents, or about 9% of the population, identify as atheists. Further, some minority religious organizations claim the government's omittance of religion from public life encourages an absence of religion rather than the existence of multiple religions separate from the state.

As the percentage of Uruguayans who identify as Catholic has declined, some, often former members of the Catholic Church, have converted to Protestantism. The number of residents practicing Protestantism has steadily risen, from just under 3.5% of the population in 1990 to over 15% in 2024. While religious beliefs vary by denomination, Protestantism in Uruguay tends to emphasize personal salvation, morality, and has a traditionally less complex relationship with the government, appealing to many people. Nevertheless, Catholicism still influences norms

and institutions in Uruguay. Many Uruguayans participate in traditional Catholic festivals and celebrations, such as ***Epifanía*** (Epiphany) and ***Día de la Candelaria*** (Candlemas Day), which often include large meals, dancing, and music (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

**Catholicism:** This religion is intertwined with the everyday lives of many Uruguayans. Even some of those who identify as non-religious engage in Catholic ceremonies and celebrations. Rites of passage, such as baptism, first communion, and confirmation, are part of many Uruguayans' cultures (see *Family and Kinship*). Likewise, some Uruguayans take part in pilgrimages to holy sites, such as the Cathedral of Florida, where the venerated image of *Nuestra Señora de los Treinta y Tres* is housed. In 1988, Pope John Paul II visited the cathedral during a papal visit to Uruguay.

Uruguay's Catholic Church consists of nine dioceses with the seat of the archdiocese residing in Montevideo. Since 2014, Daniel Sturla has occupied the role of archbishop.

**Other Christian Churches:** Accounting for around 510,000 members, Protestantism is the second most common Christian denomination in Uruguay. In recent years, certain Protestant groups, such as Evangelicals and Pentecostals, have experienced a surge in membership.

In the 1940s, Jehovah's Witnesses emerged in Uruguay as immigrants fleeing Nazi German occupation began to establish missions. Today, the country is home to some 120,000 members, or about 3.5% of the population. Likewise, in the 19th century, Italian immigrants, many of whom belonged to the Waldensian Evangelical Church, established the town of Colonia Valdense in the southwestern region of the country. Today, some 7,500 Waldensians live in Uruguay, many of whom reside in Montevideo. Other Christian minorities include the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (also known as Mormons) and Orthodox Christians, among others.

**Other Religions:** Various non-Christian religious minorities live in Uruguay. Between 2008-20, the percentage of Uruguayans who practice Umbanda (a Brazilian syncretic religion that combines Catholic with African and Indigenous traditional and ancestral religious beliefs) rose from about 0.7% to over 2%. Adherents believe in connections between humans and the spirit world, and depending on the community, they emphasize beliefs like reincarnation or racial democracy. One important Umbandist deity, ***Iemanja*** (goddess of the sea), is associated with fertility, crop abundance, and the hunt, and regarded as the protector of pregnant women, children, farmers, and hunters. To celebrate her, many Umbandists travel to Ramírez Beach in Montevideo every February 2nd, where they dress in white robes and prepare sand alters with offerings. While traditional offerings featured animal sacrifice, today, they comprise flowers, fruits, foods, and candles. Other celebrations of *Iemanja* include playing music like candombe (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*), dancing, and watching the tides of the *Río de la Plata* estuary.

Judaism was first practiced by ***conversos*** (crypto-Jews–Jewish people who practice Judaism in secret), who were forced to publicly accept Christianity but secretly continued to practice their Jewish faith. In the late 19th century, immigrants, primarily from Europe, established synagogues in the country. Today, Uruguay is home to about 30,000 practicing Jews, most of whom live in the Villa Muñoz and Pocitos neighborhoods of Montevideo, which is known as the Jewish Quarter.

Experts estimate that Uruguay is home to about 1,500 Muslims, many of whom live in Chuy, near the border with Brazil, and Montevideo. Less than 1% of the population practices Hinduism, Buddhism, and various other faiths.

# 4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

## Overview

The family is the center of Uruguayan life and provides emotional, economic, and social support. Uruguayan families are typically close-knit and involved in members' life decisions. Marrying and starting a family remain a priority for many young adults.

## Residence

Uruguay began to urbanize rapidly in the 19th century. As of 2023, the country is one of the world's most urban, as some 96% of Uruguayans live in cities and about 50% in the greater area of the capital, Montevideo. Most Uruguayans have access to electricity and indoor plumbing. In the 1960s, the government began a cooperative housing program to improve the living conditions of low-income families. Program initiatives include state financing and technical guidance to construct new homes, as well as the creation of collective ownership and self-management resources. Many homes have a ***parrilla*** ("grill," often an open-pit barbecue grill), where residents roast meat during ***asados*** (barbecues, see *Sustenance and Health*).

**Urban:** City dwellings vary by neighborhood, and both houses and apartments are common. Many houses are inspired by European (primarily Spanish, Italian, and French) architecture. These homes often feature high ceilings, large windows, and courtyards. Apartments are often in multistory buildings, have one or two bedrooms, and are equipped with modern appliances like electric or gas stoves and washing machines. Some upscale apartments offer amenities such as private pools, spas, and 24-hour security services. Many residences feature balconies or terraces with views of the ocean or other natural surroundings. Migration from rural areas to cities has resulted in the development of ***cantegriles*** (shantytowns), where some residents build homes from wood, concrete bricks, or other readily available materials.

**Rural:** While rural homes traditionally used materials like ***adobe*** (clay) and straw in the past, modern materials such as brick, steel, tin, and wood are more common today. Some rural residents live on ***estancias*** (parcels of land used to breed livestock, see *Economics and Resources*), which traditionally had a big one- or two-story colonial-style house made of *adobe* brick with gardens. Others live in ***ranchos***, small houses traditionally made of *adobe* and straw or wood with a thatched roof, or in one-to-two-bedroom homes on the property of *estancias* that have converted into resorts.

## Family Structure

In Uruguayan families, the father is traditionally the primary breadwinner and head-of-household, while the mother is responsible for domestic tasks and childcare. In some urban areas, traditional attitudes are changing, and more women work outside the home (see *Sex and Gender*). While traditional households consist of multiple generations, younger urban Uruguayans more commonly live with just their nuclear (immediate) family. Generally, Uruguayans highly regard their elders and tend to be respectful and courteous in their company.

## Children

While Uruguayan families historically had many children, they have fewer today (see *Sex and Gender*). Parents' involvement in their children's lives generally continues into adulthood. Many middle- and upper-class families have maids or nannies, though lower-class mothers and daughters typically assume childcare responsibilities. Although daughters traditionally learned skills and roles from their mothers and sons from their fathers, this standard has begun to change, in part due to an increase in households led by single or other non-traditional parents. Due somewhat to high living costs and expenses related to otherwise free public higher education (see *Learning and Knowledge*), many lower- and middle-class families do not expect their children to move out of the family home.

**Birth:** While baby showers are uncommon, many Uruguayans bring gifts such as baby clothes, diapers, and flowers to expectant mothers. After birth, mothers tend to leave their jobs to stay home and rear children, as ***guarderías*** (daycares, see *Learning and Knowledge*) are uncommon in many parts of the country. Grandmothers typically provide significant support to the family, parents, and baby.

**Naming:** While naming conventions vary (see *Language and Communication*), Uruguayans often name their children after Catholic saints or other biblical figures (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In recent years, some Uruguayans have named their children after popular Brazilian and Mexican ***telenovela*** (soap opera) characters (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

**Rites of Passage**

Uruguayans, even those who are non-religious, typically observe the Roman Catholic rite of passage of baptizing their children within a few months after birth (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Some Uruguayan 15-year-old girls have a ***quinceañera*** (15th birthday party) to celebrate their transition into adulthood. These are large parties with friends and family that often include festivities like a father-daughter dance, food, and music. Some affluent families travel abroad to ski or go to the beach instead of having a *quinceañera*.

**Dating and Courtship:** Uruguayans typically begin dating in their late teens and seek their parents' approval of their partners. It is common for residents to marry around their mid-20s, although the age in rural areas is often younger.Some urban couples cohabitate before marriage, and common-law marriage is increasingly socially acceptable.

**Weddings:** Pre-wedding celebrations typically occur a few days before the wedding. Many Uruguayans have bachelor and bachelorette parties, similar to those in the US. The best man and maid of honor often oversee organizing these parties, which usually include drinking, going out to bars, and dancing throughout the night.

Most weddings comprise a civil ceremony performed at a municipal office and a religious one at a church. The religious ceremony often takes place in the morning, while the reception occurs in the afternoon and continues through the late night. Uruguayan and American wedding attire is similar, with brides usually wearing white gowns, and grooms suits. Men tend to wear brightly colored accessories, such as intricate neckties. During the ceremony, family and friends gather to witness the couple exchange vows and rings.

A reception follows and usually begins with the bride and groom dancing to a waltz with their father and mother, respectively. Typically, a toastmaster guides guests through the reception that features a large meal, speeches, and first dance. In rural areas, *asados* are common and often feature roasting an entire cow. After the wedding, couples often go on a honeymoon at local beaches such as Punta del Este in the Southeast.

### Divorce

While legal since 1907 for men and 1912 for women, divorce is uncommon in Uruguay, although it is increasing. As of 2022, the divorce rate was 0.7 per 1,000 inhabitants, lower than neighboring Brazil (1.4) and the US (2.4). If both parties agree to divorce, they must go through a legal process which takes between 3-12 months to resolve in court. Either party can also request a court-ordered separation for a 3-year period, after which either party can apply for a certificate of divorce.

### Death

Uruguayans typically hold a funeral immediately following a death. Families often dress in all black and gather at a funeral home to pay respects to the deceased prior to burial. Following the funeral, some family members assist with carrying the coffin to a cemetery or hearse. Due to limited space, many cemeteries contain mausoleums or other above-ground enclosures. Likewise, cremation is common. Some families scatter their cremated loved one's ashes in the deceased's chosen location, often in the Atlantic Ocean, parks, or stadiums.

# 5. SEX AND GENDER

## Overview

Traditionally, the Uruguayan social system was patriarchal, meaning men held most power and authority. While Uruguay commits to securing women's rights today, gaps in some areas persist. Women take a more active role in caregiving, and the social system generally favors men. Uruguay ranked 31 of 144 countries in a 2022 gender equality index, higher than neighboring Argentina (44) and Brazil (78) and the US (38).

## Gender Roles and Work

**Domestic Work:** Women in Uruguayan society traditionally took on most household responsibilities, like chores and childcare. Today, women are still the primary caretaker in the home, though some couples increasingly share household responsibilities. In present day Uruguay, both parents usually work (see *Family and Kinship*).

**Labor Force:** In 2023, some 56% of Uruguayan women worked outside the home, which is similar to the US (57%) but higher than Brazil (53%) and Argentina (51%). As of 2022, around 23% of women held a position in vulnerable employment. This status means they were less likely to have formal work arrangements, social protections and other safety nets, making them vulnerable to poverty (see *Economics and Resources*). In the same year, women occupied about 36% of senior- and middle-management positions, lower than Argentina and Brazil (both 38%) and the US (43%). Men are more likely to occupy positions in science, technology, and other specialized fields, and women in caregiving roles and the services sector.

## Gender and the Law

In 1987, the Ministry of Education and Culture created the ***Instituto Nacional de la Mujer*** (National Institute for Women), which is the first time the government formally incorporated women's welfare and improving their status into the public

agenda. At the global level, Uruguay has ratified commitments regarding gender equality and women's rights and continues to establish national laws to advance women's equality. Uruguay created the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2030 as a road map with 11 goals to achieve greater gender equality. Despite these and other laws, discrimination and a gender pay gap persist even though wage discrimination is illegal. For example, women's average earnings in 2023 were around 67% of men's. This gap is a result of differences in profession, sector, and the tendency for women to work part-time to care for their children.

Uruguayan law guarantees parental leave and other benefits. The government entitles new mothers to a rest period of at least 14 weeks. Although it varies, leave typically begins 6 weeks before the expected delivery date and ends 8 weeks after birth. Mothers also have the right to an extension of this leave by up to 6 months in special cases related to pregnancy or childbirth. Fathers may take up to 10 continuous days of paternity leave beginning on the day of the birth. Uruguay's ***Banco de Previsión Social*** (Social Security Bank) also compensates parents with a financial allowance and other benefits. While the minimum age for marriage is 16, the law requires parental consent until age 18.

### Gender and Politics

In 1932, Uruguay granted women universal suffrage, and in 1938, women voted for the first time. By 1942, Uruguay had elected its first women legislators. In 1946, the government adopted the Women's Civil Rights Act, which gave women greater political rights, and representation continued to expand over the years. After this progress, women endured several social and political setbacks between 1973-85 under a military dictatorship (see *History and Myth*). After democracy was restored, Uruguay again addressed women's issues. As of early 2024, women hold about 25% and 32% of seats in the lower and upper chambers, respectively, similar to the US (29% and 25%), lower than Argentina (42% and 46%) higher than Brazil (18% and 17%).

### Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is an issue in Uruguay. As of 2023, about 77% of women aged 15 and older report having experienced GBV in some form. Uruguay's femicide (murder of a woman based on her gender) rate of 2.3 per 100,000 females in 2021 is lower than the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) average (3.6) and the US (2.9), but higher than Argentina (1.3). The government officially recognized violence against women in 1985 and established the first Police Station for the Protection of Women in Montevideo. Today, Uruguay participates in local and global efforts to combat GBV. For example, Uruguay cooperates with the Inter-American Development Bank to implement the Comprehensive Citizen Security Program. This initiative aims to increase Uruguay's capacity to prevent homicides and GBV in areas where at-risk populations concentrate.

### Sex and Procreation

Between 1960-2022, Uruguay's birthrate declined from 2.8 births per woman to 1.5, slightly below the US rate (1.7) and LAC average (1.8). Likely due to stricter laws preventing child marriage in the past decade, Uruguay's adolescent fertility rate decreased from 65 births per 1,000 girls age 15-19 in 2012 to 35 in 2022, far lower than the LAC rate (52). In 2012, Uruguay legalized abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and 14 weeks when the pregnancy results from rape. While abortion is available, the pregnant woman must experience like multiple consultations and a 5-day waiting period.

### Homosexuality in Uruguay

In 2009, Uruguay became the first LAC country to allow same-sex couples in legal civil unions to adopt children. In 2013, the government legalized same-sex marriage, becoming the second LAC country to do so after Argentina.

At this time, the US State Department does not have a Status of Forces Agreement in place for Uruguay. Service members will be subject to local laws with regards to this topic.

# 6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

## Language Overview

Spanish is Uruguay's *de facto* official and the primary language of government, business, education, and the media.

## Spanish


Spanish conquerors brought their language to the region beginning in the 16th century (see *History and Myth*). Today, almost all Uruguayans speak a dialect of Spanish known as ***castellano*** (Castilian) after a region of Spain, instead of ***español*** (Spanish), the term commonly used in many other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Spanish uses the same alphabet as English with three additional consonants–ch, ll (usually pronounced like "y" as in yam or "j" as in jam), and ñ (pronounced like the "ny" in the word canyon).

Uruguayan Spanish differs from that of other LAC countries in its unique grammar forms, pronunciation, intonation, and slang. In Spanish grammar, ***voseo*** is the use of the informal ***vos*** as a second-person singular pronoun, along with its associated verbal forms, instead of ***tú*** (see "Forms of Address" below). Uruguayans also use some terms that differ from Spanish speakers in Spain and other parts of LAC, such as ***ta*** or ***da*** (okay), ***gurí*** (child), ***bo*** or ***vo*** (buddy), and ***salado*** ("salty," meaning "amazing," "awful," or "huge").

Uruguay is also home to several regional dialects. ***Rioplatense*** ("of the River Plate") typically refers to the dialect spoken in Montevideo and the southern coast, where most Uruguayans live (see *Political and Social Relations*). This dialect's main pronunciation difference is the use of the "sh" sound for words with "ll" and "y," such as by pronouncing "***pollo***" (chicken) as "pos*h*o." While this dialect is similar to the ***porteño*** ("port city person") dialect spoken in and around Argentina's capital, Buenos Aires, it does not feature the same level of rhythmic intonation caused by omitting certain vowels. In areas near the

border with Brazil, many residents often use a pidgin language (a simplified means of communication) known as ***fronterizo*** (border) ***portunhol***, which combines elements of Spanish and Portuguese. Likewise, some residents, often in the interior, use the *tú* pronoun with *vos* conjugations instead of the *voseo*.

### Other Languages

Uruguay is also home to speakers of many other languages. Historically, official policy encouraged immigration from Europe (see *Political and Social Relations*), resulting in some 41,000 *voseo* speakers of Galician (a language primarily spoken in northwestern Spain), as well as German (31,000), French (21,000), Greek (14,000), and Russian (14,000). In addition, about 31,000 residents, some of whom are Brazilians, speak Portuguese.

**English:** Due to its increasing importance to global commerce, English is a common second language in Uruguay, which has around 510,000 speakers (mostly as a second language). Today, many students receive English instruction (see *Learning and Knowledge*). As of 2023, Uruguay ranked 39 of 113 countries in an English proficiency index, a classification of "moderate proficiency." Many English speakers live in touristic areas (see *Economics and Resources*) or Montevideo.


**Italian:** This language has affected Uruguay's linguistic landscape for centuries. Most Italian immigrants arrived in Uruguay in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (see *Political and Social Relations*). Italian influenced the intonation of *Rioplatense* and some hand gestures (see "Gestures" below). Today, about 90,000 Uruguayans speak Italian, mainly in Montevideo and other urban areas.

### Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Uruguay requires not only knowledge of Spanish, but also the ability to interact effectively using all domains of language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures),

and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

### Communication Style

Uruguayans tend to be expressive communicators and typically speak with animated gestures. Conversations are often energetic and emotional. Many Uruguayans ask personal questions, generally about family or finances, and sometimes consider conversation partners impolite if they do not make such inquiries.

Uruguayans tend to interrupt the speaker during conversation, particularly when interested and passionate about the topic. Interruptions and raised voices do not necessarily indicate agitation or rudeness. While some Uruguayans have a direct communication style, others imply their intended meaning and prefer to avoid confrontation by resolving the issue indirectly or in private.

Nonverbal communication, particularly eye contact, shows respect and attentiveness while listening and honesty when speaking (see *Time and Space*). Many Uruguayans, regardless of gender, touch their conversation partner's arm, shoulder, and back, actions they often view as a sign of friendliness and attentiveness. Many Uruguayans also tend to stand closer to each other than Americans and consider backing away from someone to maintain personal space during conversation rude.

### Greetings

Uruguayans tend to value greetings, the most common of which is a firm handshake with eye contact. Uruguayan women and family or close friends, regardless of sex, typically greet with a kiss on the right cheek. Men may greet other men with an ***abrazo*** (hug) and give back slaps to good friends and family.

Greetings are usually accompanied by the phrase ***buenos días*** (“good morning”), ***buenas tardes*** (“good afternoon”), or ***buenas noches*** (“good evening,” typically used after the sun has set). Uruguayans often extend these greetings to neighbors or when passing someone on the street in smaller towns. In urban areas, Uruguayans rarely greet or smile at strangers on the street, which sometimes are considered provocative. Though not a formal greeting, many preface their greetings with “*bo*” or “***che***,” words they often use to informally gain someone’s attention, similar to saying “hey.”

### Names

A Uruguayan name typically comprises one or two first names and two last names, usually their father’s and mother’s surnames, which convey their family heritage. Many Uruguayans use their first given and surname (usually the father’s), while reserving their full name for legal and formal matters. Married women can opt to adopt their husband’s name but often keep their maiden name. In the past, some married women would take their husband’s surname or keep their paternal last name and follow it with ***de*** (“of”) and their husband’s last name. Uruguayans often refer to each other with a shortened version of their first name or a nickname. They may add the diminutive “ito” and “ita” (for males and females, respectively), sometimes with slight modification to the end of a name to signify affection. For example, Juan becomes Juanito and Carla becomes Carlita.

### Forms of Address

Titles depend on age, social status, and relationship but are generally formal and courteous. In many business or professional settings, Uruguayans typically use titles of respect such as ***señor*** (“Mr.”), ***señora*** (“Mrs.”), and ***señorita*** (for young/unmarried women), sometimes with last name. To demonstrate special deference to family members, Uruguayans may use only the relative’s title but not the name. For example, a Uruguayan may address his aunt using just the title ***tía*** (aunt).

Uruguayans also adjust their usage of "you" pronouns and verb conjugations depending on the level of formality required. Many residents use the formal *Usted* in business and professional settings, when speaking to those of higher status, or to indicate respect. Nevertheless, *vos*, derived from the plural form of the informal "you," or *tú* are more common, and Uruguayans often use them among family, friends, and strangers. Uruguayans typically make a "ch-ch" sound to get someone's attention.

### Conversational Topics

After initial polite greetings, Uruguayans typically engage in light conversation about work and family. Other common topics of conversation are Uruguayan culture, cuisine, and politics (see *Political and Social Relations*). ***Fútbol*** (soccer) and other sports (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*) are also customary conversational topics. Foreign nationals should avoid sharing opinions about certain potentially offensive political issues such as the country's response to military dictatorship (see *History and Myth*), social issues (see *Political and Social Relations*), confusing Uruguay with Paraguay, or compare the country to Argentina or Brazil, as many Uruguayans are proud of their nationality and unique culture.

### Gestures

Uruguayans often use gestures in conversation. They beckon by holding the palm of the hand upward while making a scratching motion with their fingers. Placing hands on the hips can be confrontational or signify boredom, while using the American "OK" sign is considered offensive. Uruguayans typically pinpoint people by moving their head in the person's direction, as they consider pointing with the index finger rude. Brushing fingertips underneath the chin can mean "I don't know" or "I don't care."

### Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

## Useful Words and Phrases

| English | Spanish |
|---|---|
| Hello | Hola |
| How are you? | ¿Cómo estás? / ¿Cómo andás? |
| I am well | Estoy bien |
| Excuse me | Disculpe / Perdón |
| Yes / No | Sí / No |
| Please | Por favor |
| Thank you | Gracias |
| You are welcome | De nada |
| I'm sorry | Lo siento |
| I don't understand | No entiendo |
| What is your name? | ¿Cuál es tu nombre? / ¿Cómo te llamás? |
| My name is | Me llamo |
| Where are you from? | ¿De dónde sos? |
| I am from the US | Yo soy de los Estados Unidos |
| Goodbye | Chau / Adiós |
| Good morning/day | Buenos días / Buen día |
| Good afternoon | Buenas tardes |
| Good evening | Buenas noches |
| What does ___ mean? | ¿Qué significa ___? |
| What is this? | ¿Qué es esto? |
| I would like a ___ | Quisiera un/a ___ |
| How do you say ___? | ¿Cómo se dice ___? |
| …in English? | …en inglés? |
| …in Spanish? | …en español? |
| What do you want? | ¿Qué querés? |
| What time is it? | ¿Qué hora es? |
| Yesterday | Ayer |
| Today | Hoy |
| Tomorrow | Mañana |
| Where is the doctor? | ¿Dónde está el médico? |
| Who? | ¿Quién? |
| When? | ¿Cuándo? |
| Where? | ¿Dónde? |
| Which? | ¿Cuál? |
| Why? | ¿Por qué? |
| Car | Coche / Auto / Carro |
| Plane | Avión |
| Bus | Ómnibus / Bus / Bondi |
| Left / Right / Straight | Izquierda / Derecha / Derecho |

# 7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

### Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 98.8%
- Male: 98.5%
- Female: 99% (2019 estimate)

### Early Education

Before the arrival of Spanish colonists (see *History and Myth*), regional inhabitants, such as the Charrúa and Guaraní, informally transmitted values, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to generations through stories and myths (see *History and Myth*).

### Spanish Education

In the Spanish colonial era (see *History and Myth*), the primary focus of education was to impart basic literacy and instruction in Roman Catholicism. Various Roman Catholic orders founded schools for local elites and some Indigenous groups (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

In 1745, the Jesuit order established the country's first primary school in Montevideo to facilitate religious conversion of the Indigenous population (see *Political and Social Relations*). However, the region's lack of precious metals and Indigenous labor compared to Spain's other colonies hindered Spanish colonization and the creation of a centralized education system.

### Education After Independence

Following its independence from Brazil in 1828, Uruguay struggled to develop a central, standardized educational system, primarily due to economic and political instability (see *History and Myth*).

In the 1830s, efforts to create institutional stability resulted in the country's first university. In 1849, Uruguay founded the

***Universidad de la República*** (University of the Republic) in Montevideo, which offered courses in Latin, law, math, philosophy, and theology.

In the 1860s, influential Uruguayan educator José Pedro Varela published works encouraging progressive educational reforms, seeking to create free, compulsory education for all Uruguayans regardless of sex, race, or economic status. In 1876, the dictatorship of Lorenzo Latorre (Dictator from 1876-80, see *History and Myth*) adopted Varela's ideas. Education became free, secular, and compulsory at the primary level. In 1877, the ***Ley de Educación Común*** (Common Education Law) established a national centralized educational system.

Meanwhile, by 1875, the government had improved professional teacher training to account for the increase in primary school enrollment, and in 1895, Uruguay established the ***Instituto de Formación Docente*** (Teacher Training Institute) to provide teachers with a professional teaching certificate. Further, the ***Instituto Nacional de Educación Técnica*** (National Institute of Technical Education) was founded as an extension of the secondary school system.

### Education in the 20th Century

In the 1920s, the liberal government of José Batlle y Ordóñez (see *History and Myth*) expanded education to rural residents and adults. Access to university courses became free, and female students were accepted at the post-secondary level. In the mid-20th century, the country's political development became closely intertwined with student activism, and campuses across the country began to radicalize. Student sit-ins and riots demanded representation in school governance. In 1958, the Organic University Law granted students and faculty autonomy to elect governing bodies.

Between 1973-85, Uruguay fell under an authoritarian military dictatorship (see *History and Myth*). Social activism on campuses ended as students and teachers faced imprisonment, and the *Universidad de la República* temporarily closed. The government sought to reform the educational system and established the ***Consejo Nacional de Educación*** (National Council for Education) to oversee all public education. It also reorganized the national curriculum. Trade schools emerged as the country sought to modernize and improve the national economy (see *History and Myth*).

After democracy was restored in 1985 (see *History and Myth*), the government sought to further improve educational quality, especially in rural areas. The school day increased from 4 to 7.5 hours, schools began to provide students snacks and meals, and the national curriculum broadened. Likewise, a developmental program equipped teachers and administrators with tools to enhance the quality of education. Between 1999-2012, the rate at which impoverished students repeated first grade declined from about 24% to 13%, and those in second grade from around 18% to 10%.

### Modern Education System

Today, education in Uruguay is provided by the state and compulsory for all citizens, with a mandated minimum of 14 years of schooling starting at age 4, though only around 63% of Uruguayans over age 25 have completed this obligation. Most students attend free government-run schools, although some enroll in private, often religious schools. Some private schools that cater to middle- and upper-class Uruguayans, usually in urban areas, teach mostly European or North American curricula, in addition to the mandatory Uruguayan curricula. In 2021, about 16% of primary-age students attended private, fee-based schools, lower than neighboring Argentina (25%) and Brazil (18%), but higher than the US (9%).

The National Public Education Administration oversees all school accreditation and is tasked with assuring that educators meet national benchmarks. Likewise, the National Institute for Educational Assessment works with teachers to ensure national assessment frameworks account for all students' needs. In recent years, student scores on international assessments have highlighted inequity between public and private schools. In a 2022 assessment of performance in reading, math, and science, Uruguay ranked below the US with similar scores to Mexico and Brazil. However, some students attending private institutions achieved much higher scores.

Since 2007, Uruguay's Ceibal project has improved educational equality for disadvantaged populations through access to digital tools. The government-approved initiative purchased Internet and a laptop for every child enrolled in primary school to improve equal access to educational resources. Likewise, teachers received a laptop, user training, and online course materials. Between 2005-13, the government also increased spending on education, primarily at the pre-primary level. In 2021, Uruguay spent about 4.4% of its GDP on education, higher than Paraguay (3.4%), but lower than Argentina (4.6%) and the US (5.6%).

**Pre-Primary:** Uruguayan children ages 3-5 years receive state-funded public ***educación inicial*** (initial education), though some get their instruction at private schools. Enrollment in *educación inicial* is mandatory beginning at age 4. This level of education prepares children for ***primaria*** (primary education) by improving their learning abilities. Some 97% of children of the appropriate age attended pre-primary programs in 2020.

**Basic Education:** *Primaria* begins at age 6 and comprises grades 1-6. Most schools follow the national curriculum, which consists of Spanish, foreign languages such as English and Portuguese, math, physical education, arts, history, and natural sciences. All public primary schools require uniforms, usually a

white smock with a blue bow, though some private institutions do not. Around 99% of children of the appropriate age attended primary school in 2017.

**Secondary Education:** This level divides into two mandatory stages: ***ciclo básico*** (basic cycle, grades 7-9) and ***ciclo superior*** (superior cycle, grades 10-12). *Ciclo básico* consists of general education courses. During *ciclo superior*, students choose between academic or vocational programs, both of which are provided by the state. While both programs have core curricula similar to that of *ciclo básico*, vocational studies generally dedicate a significant portion of the school day to technical, industrial, or agricultural training in a specific trade. Upon completing *ciclo superior*, students receive a ***bachillerato*** (baccalaureate) certificate, similar to a high school diploma in the US. Some 88% of children of the appropriate age attended secondary school in 2017.

**Post-Secondary School:** Uruguay has two public universities that offer government-paid tuition for Uruguayans: the *Universidad de la República* and the ***Universidad Tecnológica del Uruguay*** (Technological University of Uruguay). Students who graduate with a *bachillerato* are eligible for admission with no entry exams or quotas. Despite no tuition, the high cost of living (see *Family and Kinship*), along with the cost of books and other fees, has negatively impacted students' completion of post-secondary degrees. As of 2018, just under 12% of the population age 25 and older held a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent, lower than the rates in Brazil (17%) and the US (35%). Uruguay also has five private universities: the ***Universidad Católica del Uruguay*** (Catholic University of Uruguay), ***Universidad ORT Uruguay*** (ORT University Uruguay), ***Universidad de la Empresa*** (Business University), ***Universidad de Montevideo*** (University of Montevideo), and ***Centro Latinoamericano de Economía Humana*** (Latin American Center for Human Economy).

# 8. TIME AND SPACE

**Overview**

Uruguayans view interpersonal relationships, reputation, and respect as vital to conducting business, though attitudes are often more casual in personal settings. Generally, Uruguayans' personal space preferences vary by degree of familiarity.

**Time and Work**

Uruguay's workweek runs from Monday-Friday. Most business occurs between 9am-5pm, and an extended lunch break around 12pm is common. Though hours vary widely by store size and location, shops typically open during the week from 9am-6pm or 7pm and on Saturday from 9am-2:30pm. Banks are open on weekdays from 1pm-5pm, and post offices operate Monday-Friday from 8am-6pm and Saturday from 8am-1pm. Government office opening hours are not standardized, but service tends to be available during the middle of the day.

**Working Conditions:**

Although Uruguay lacks a centralized labor code, employees are protected by a range of labor-related laws of varying hierarchies. These protections mandate a maximum of a 44-hour, 5-day workweek in the commercial sector and a maximum of a 48-hour, 6-day workweek in the industrial sector. They also enforce a national monthly minimum wage (US $584 as of 2024); ensure a range of employee benefits, such as paid vacation, sick leave, and parental leave (see *Sex and Gender*); and prohibit exploitative and child labor. Uruguayans have access to a comprehensive welfare state and social security system that cover pensions, health insurance, sick pay, and unemployment insurance. Uruguay's labor rights are some of Latin America's most robust, underpinned by extensive legal protections and widespread, well-organized unions. The International Trade Union Confederation downgraded Uruguay's rank in its 2022 Global Rights Index, largely due to an increase in anti-union activity and legislation. Additionally, enforcement is imperfect, and abuses, particularly child labor, occur.

Nevertheless, Uruguay features some of Latin America's best working conditions.

**Time Zone:** Uruguay adheres to Uruguay Time (UYT), which is 3 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 2 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Uruguay does not observe Daylight Saving Time.

**Date Notation:** Like the US, Uruguay uses the Western (Gregorian) Calendar. Unlike Americans, Uruguayans write the day first, followed by the month and year.

**National Holidays**

- January 1: New Year's Day
- Feb/Mar: Carnival Monday and Tuesday
- Mar/Apr: ***Semana de Turismo*** (Tourism Week)
- April 19: Landing of the 33 Patriots Day
- May 1: Labor Day
- June 19: Birthday of José Artigas
- July 18: Constitution Day (see *History and Myth*)
- August 25: Independence Day (see *History and Myth*).
- December 25: Family Day (Christmas)

The dates of holidays listed with 2 months are contingent on when Easter Sunday occurs, which is the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox.

### Time and Business

In business contexts, Uruguayans generally value punctuality and adhere to deadlines, though engagements sometimes begin a few minutes after the scheduled start time. Uruguay's business culture emphasizes personal connections and trust. Meetings often begin with substantial polite conversation to establish rapport (see *Language and Communication*), and the pace of business accelerates as one gets to know their counterparts. To better facilitate relationships, Uruguayans often reference

mutual connections by name while conducting business. Meetings can be long (sometimes lasting 2-3 hours, especially during lunch) and are generally confirmed the day prior. Likewise, it can be difficult to arrange meetings during the summer months (January-February). The business environment in Uruguay is formal and hierarchical. Top-level employees make most decisions, and demonstrating respect to those in positions of authority is an essential component of business.

### Public and Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Uruguay depends on the nature of the relationship. Uruguayans generally stand close to one another during conversation and touch more frequently than Americans when among friends and family. Uruguayans tend to consider it unsociable to stand at a distance during conversation.

**Touch:** In formal business settings, Uruguayans generally greet with a firm handshake, which they repeat when saying goodbye. Uruguayans usually reserve physical affection for family and friends, and a hug and cheek kisses are the norm for greeting. Cheek kisses are especially common among women and between men and women.

**Eye Contact:** Direct eye contact is customary in conversation, though Uruguayans may interpret uninterrupted direct staring as hostile behavior (see *Language and Communication*).

### Photographs

Some museums, churches, and military installations limit photography. Foreign nationals should ask permission when photographing Uruguayans (especially children).

### Driving

Roads in large cities and towns like Montevideo, Salto, and Ciudad de la Costa are well-maintained, lit, and signposted. In the countryside, unpaved and uneven roads are common. Traffic can be heavy in urban centers and along major tourist routes but is rare in the country's interior. Like Americans, Uruguayans drive on the right side of the road. Uruguay's rate of traffic-related deaths in 2019 was 12, slightly lower than the US (12.8).

# 9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

## Overview

Uruguayan clothing, recreation, sports, and arts tend to reflect the country's rich history and blend of European, Indigenous, and African traditions.

## Dress and Appearance

**Traditional:** Some rural Uruguayans wear traditional dress for holidays and special events. Men's traditional clothing typically is based on styles of ***gauchos*** (cowboys, see *History and Myth*), consisting of a beret (round, flat cloth hat), ***bombachas*** (wide-legged capri pants), boots, and a scarf or necktie. Rural women's traditional dress consists of *bombachas* or a skirt and a white shirt. Some rural men and women also wear ***alpargatas*** (colorful shoes made from canvas and rope), wide brimmed straw hats, and ponchos woven from llama or alpaca wool that protect against cold weather. Traditional dress is less common in urban areas.

**Modern:** In urban areas, many residents follow the latest European fashion trends. Men typically wear jeans or pants, collared shirts, and well-kept shoes. Women often wear jeans or skirts with a blouse or t-shirt or dresses. In business settings, Uruguayans typically prefer formal styles, such as dark suits or dresses/pantsuits. Older people tend to dress more formally.

## Recreation and Leisure

Uruguayans tend to spend their leisure time with family and friends. Typical activities are gathering for ***asados*** ("barbecues," see *Sustenance and Health*) and ***fiestas*** ("parties" or "public celebrations"); going to beaches and cafés; watching TV, movies, and ***telenovelas*** (soap operas); and playing sports.

**Holidays and Festivals:** Uruguayans hold a variety of festivals and community celebrations, many reflecting the country's

Catholic roots (see *Religion and Spirituality*), European and Indigenous traditions, African heritage, or historical events.

Uruguay hosts a variety of *fiestas* annually. Several residents celebrate Carnival between late January and early March, which coincides with the week before Lent (a 40-day period of prayer and spiritual reflection observed by Catholics), and celebrations vary by region. In Palermo and Sur, neighborhoods in Montevideo, ***comparsas*** (troupes, or parades of singers, dancers, and musicians) attract thousands of visitors. ***Las Llamadas*** (The Calls) is the country's largest procession, typically comprising over 40 different music ensembles and dancers, who wear colorful, sparkly costumes. Other festivities include fireworks, music, and live shows on ***tablados*** (street stages).

Some national holidays commemorate important dates in Uruguayan history. On August 25, Uruguayans celebrate ***Día de la Independencia*** (Independence Day) – the country's independence from Brazil in 1828 (see *History and Myth*). Some associated traditions include concerts, fireworks, and parades to celebrate and honor Uruguayan culture and history.

### Sports and Games

Uruguayans participate in a wide variety of sports like soccer, basketball, netball (similar to basketball but played without a backboard attached to the hoop), volleyball, boxing, rugby, tennis, and horse racing. Watersports such as boating, rowing, and swimming are also popular. Uruguay participates in international competitions such as the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, ***Copa América*** (America Cup), and Pan American Games. Notable Uruguayan athletes include rower Juan Rodríguez, who won two Olympic bronze medals in the men's doubles sculls event in 1948 and 1952; racing cyclist Milton Wynants, who competed in four straight Summer Olympics between 1996-2008; and more recently, lightweight rower Felipe Klüver won the 2021 World Indoor Rowing Championship.

**Soccer:** ***Fútbol*** (soccer) is Uruguay's most popular sport, with youth learning through neighborhood pick-up games, at school, and in amateur leagues. Montevideo's Estadio Centenario is one of the world's most iconic stadiums and the first venue to ever host a FIFA World Cup Final, in 1930. The Uruguayan national team, nicknamed ***La Celeste*** (The Sky Blue), won two Gold Medals at the Summer Olympics (1924 and 1928) as well as two World Cups (1930 and 1950). They also won the *Copa América* for the 15th time in 2011.

Some observers regard *fútbol* player Obdulio Varela, nicknamed ***El Negro Jefe*** (The Black Chief), as one of the greatest captains in soccer history for his leadership and determination, which resulted in Uruguay's 1950 World Cup victory against Brazil. Likewise, Luis Suárez, nicknamed ***El Pistolero*** (The Gunman), is one of the country's most celebrated athletes and widely regarded as the greatest Uruguayan soccer player of all time. He participated in three FIFA World Cup tournaments in 2010, 2014, and 201 8 (of which the country's best result was fourth place in 2010) and also won best player at the 2011 *Copa América*.

**Games:** Uruguayans play a variety of games. One popular card game, ***truco*** (trick), is similar to poker and played with 4-8 players, divided into teams of 2 or 4, and a 40-card Spanish deck. The object of the game is to get the opponent to make certain bets by tricking them and using bluffs. The first team to reach the agreed to score, usually 30 points, wins and yells out "*truco*."

### Music and Dance

Uruguay's rich musical and dance traditions primarily reflect African, Indigenous, and European influences. The Charrúa people (see *History and Myth*) used wooden instruments like drums and pipes, along with flutes and seashells. Throughout the 19th century, European and African influences shaped

Uruguayan folk music. *Gauchos* popularized ***payadas*** (ballads), whereby two singers take turns improvising 10-line verses while playing a tune together. Likewise, many *gauchos* performed ***milonga***, an Afro-Uruguayan lively and sensual musical genre consisting of string instruments such as violins, guitars, mandolins, and harps. *Milonga* evolved over time to incorporate dance steps and quicker rhythms, which eventually became the precursor to tango.

***Candombe*:** This musical dance style is Uruguay's national dance and an integral part of Uruguayan culture. *Candombe* music is characterized by the harmony of different drums like the ***chico*** (a small, high-pitched drum), ***repique*** (a medium-size drum), and ***piano***, which is usually the largest and lowest-pitched drum. The genre is a symbol of individualism, Afro-Uruguayans' resistance to discrimination, and an attempt to preserve their ancestry and sense of community. While *candombe* is primarily performed by *comparsas* during Carnival, the Montevideo neighborhoods of Cordón, Palermo, and Sur each have its own distinct beat and perform every Sunday and during holidays and other special events. In recent years, bands such as La Calenda Beat have incorporated *candombe* into other genres, like Afrobeat and jazz.

**Tango:** While historians disagree on its origins, some believe tango began in poor areas of Montevideo in the 1880s, when female dancers used sensual movements to attract customers to purchase services in brothels. Tango combines styles like *candombe*, *milonga,* Spanish flamenco tango, and ***vals*** (European waltz). Tango was not socially accepted until the 1920s, when it became popular in dance clubs and halls. The music features violins, pianos, double bass, and ***bandoneones*** (similar to accordions), drawing influence from African and European rhythms. In 1916, Gerardo Matos Rodríguez composed ***La Cumparsita*** (Little Street Procession), one of the most famous tangos of all time. Tango is still common today, with new bands shaping the musical style.

**Other Musical Genres:** Uruguayans listen to foreign and other Uruguayan musical styles like pop, rock, ***cumbia*** (a blended style originally from Colombia), ***reggaetón*** (a Spanish Caribbean-based genre), classical, electronic, rap, and jazz. In the 1960s, Eduardo Mateo popularized modern Uruguayan pop music by blending ***bossa nova*** ("new style" or "new trend") with jazz, rock, and local rhythms.

### Literature

With roots in oral traditions, Uruguay has a rich literary history. Local literature developed slowly until the 19th century. After Uruguay won independence from Brazil, *gaucho* literature, which emphasizes nationalism, identity, and the *gaucho* lifestyle, emerged. Bartolomé Hidalgo popularized the genre through his ***rioplatense*** ("of the River Plate," a type of Spanish that developed in the region, see *Language and Communication*) poems with themes of freedom and rural life.

In 1886, Juan Zorrilla de San Martín wrote ***Tabaré*** (an Indigenous name that translates to "someone from far away"), an epic poem that tells the love story between an Indigenous boy and Spanish girl. The poem concludes with Uruguay's genocide of the Charrúa peoples in 1831 (see *History and Myth*). Today, it is the country's national poem.

In the 20th century, Uruguayan authors explored themes ranging from identity to socio-political commentary. In 1900, José Enrique Rodó wrote *Ariel*, which emphasizes the significance of spiritual values over materialism and the importance of upholding Uruguayan identity. Juana de Ibarbourou authored poems that covered themes like female sexuality, nature, and love.

In 1919, she wrote ***Las Lenguas de Diamante*** (The Diamond Tongues), a story of youth and love that contrasts her later works, like ***Perdida*** (Lost, 1950), which focuses on despair and aging. Ibarbourou was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature four times but never won.

Between 1945-50, a group of Uruguayan writers, known as the ***Generación del '45*** (Generation '45), influenced culture and society by promoting anti-conformist sentiments. One of the most famous writers of the group, Mario Benedetti, a child of Italian immigrants, authored novels, short stories, plays, and poems describing middle-class life. His novel, ***La Tregua*** (The Truce, 1960), tells the story of a widower named Martín Santomé, who overcomes his grief from his wife's passing by having an affair with a young co-worker. The story is told entirely through diary entries and explores themes of God's will, happiness, and the complexity of relationships.

As Uruguay fell under a military dictatorship in the 1970s (see *History and Myth*), resistance literature emerged, resulting in the banning and exile of notable authors. In 1971, Eduardo Galeano wrote ***Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina*** (The Open Veins of Latin America), which analyzes the effects of colonialism, imperialism, and slavery in Latin America. In 1975, Selva Casal lost her job as a professor for her book of poems ***No Vivimos en Vano*** (We Do Not Live in Vain). The publication denounced the dictatorship through a story about violence and power struggles, highlighting the trauma committed by the state. In recent years, political commentary has evolved into ***historietas*** (comic books), which blend humor and fantasy.

### Arts and Handicrafts

Uruguay also has a rich history of painting, weaving, leatherwork, and ceramics. Some rural groups carve gourds and ***bombillas*** (straws) to drink ***yerba mate*** (a caffeinated drink made from steeping dried leaves of the *yerba mate* plant in hot water, see *Sustenance and Health*).

Uruguay is also home to notable painters such as Juan Manuel Blanes, whose 19th-century works depict the country's historical events. Pedro Figari, a Post-Impressionist painter, received international praise for his pastel landscapes of Montevideo and the countryside. Pinter, sculptor, and architect Leandro Silva Delgado created works inspired by natural landscapes – especially gardens.

# 10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

### Sustenance Overview

Meals are often important social events, with family and friends lingering for conversation and companionship. Uruguayan cuisine reflects the country's animal husbandry traditions and Italian, Spanish, and Indigenous influences.

### Dining Customs

Most Uruguayans eat three daily meals and snack throughout the day. Traditionally, ***desayuno*** (breakfast) is light, while ***almuerzo*** (lunch), served in the early afternoon, is the heartiest meal. Business schedules allow for relatively long lunch breaks (see *Time and Space*), during which some Uruguayans return home instead of eating at the office or a nearby restaurant. ***Cena*** (dinner) is often smaller than lunch and served in the late evening, frequently at 9pm or later. Consequently, many Uruguayans eat a ***copetín*** (appetizer) or ***merienda*** (snack) between 5-7pm, typically ***tortas fritas*** (fried dough made from flour, water, lard, and salt), ***bizcochos*** (pastries), ***empanadas*** (meat or cheese turnovers), ***pop*** or ***pororó*** (popcorn), ***garrapiñadas*** (peanuts roasted with sugar, water, and vanilla), or ***sandwiches de migas*** (white bread sandwiches, often made with ham and cheese).

When invited to a Uruguayan home, guests usually arrive a few minutes late and bring sweets, flowers, or a bottle of wine, rum, or whiskey (see "Beverages" below) to thank the hosts for their hospitality. Hosts typically serve their guests first, who should not begin until the host says, "***buen provecho***" (enjoy). Etiquette suggests diners should keep their hands above and elbows off the table, with the knife remaining in the dominant hand and fork in the other hand. Guests typically must decline several offers if they do not want additional servings and place their utensils vertically on the plate to show they are finished. Diners tend to take their time eating and may linger for hours to chat. After-dinner liqueur or espresso typically follows an evening meal.

On weekends, many Uruguayans gather with friends and family for ***asados*** (barbecues). Traditionally, women prepare most meals and *asado* side dishes like salads. Men usually use a ***parrilla*** (grill) to cook the ***parrillada*** (a grilled meal that typically begins with ***provoleta***, provolone cheese topped with herbs, and vegetables, followed by sausages like ***morcilla***, blood sausage, and then cuts of beef, pork, lamb, and/or chicken). Though most Uruguayans have access to a *parrilla*, those who do not typically frequent steakhouses or roadside grills instead.

### Diet

While varying by region and socioeconomic status, meals tend to highlight animal protein and make ample use of starchy foods. Many Uruguayans' Italian heritage (see *Political and Social Relations*) influences much of the country's cuisine, resulting in the prevalence of wheat-based products like pasta, bread, and pizza in many meals. Likewise, Uruguay's robust livestock sector (see *History and Myth*) has generated significant consumption of beef and other meats.

Other staples are potatoes and rice, which Uruguayans use for their versatility and low cost. Animal fats are also extensive, with cream, cheese, butter, and lard as popular ingredients in several dishes. Uruguayans eat vegetables like sweet potato, squash, onion, pumpkin, and bell pepper and fruits like apples, peaches, melons, grapes, and citrus. Common flavorings are parsley, oregano, black pepper, onion, cumin, mustard seed, and anise.

### Meals and Popular Dishes

Breakfast in Uruguay is typically small and eaten quickly. The morning meal often features toast with fruit jam or ***dulce de leche*** (caramelized condensed milk), or fruit and pastries like ***medialunas*** (croissants made with enriched egg dough) with coffee. For lunch, dishes are heavier and more elaborate. Some popular dishes are ***milanesa*** (a thin breaded beef or chicken cutlet) served with French fries or in a sandwich, ***chivito*** (steak

sandwich with lettuce, tomato, mayo, and often cheese, ham, and a fried egg), soups, and ***cazuelas*** (casseroles) of lentils, beans, vegetables, entrails, or other meats. Likewise, Italian dishes like ***tallarines*** (fettucine pasta), ***ñoquis*** (gnocchi, which are dense potato dumplings), and raviolis, often with ***salsa caruso*** (sauce made of beef broth, cream, ham, and mushrooms) are popular options. Many Uruguayans eat pasta at home on Sundays.

Dinner features similar dishes to lunch. Other options are pizza made on top of ***fainá*** (a dense flatbread made with chickpea flour), *empanadas*, polenta, and ***matambre*** (vegetables and hard-boiled eggs wrapped in beef). For dessert, Uruguayans often have sweets made with *dulce de leche*. Some popular choices are ***alfajores*** (*dulce de leche* sandwiched between butter cookies, sometimes rolled in shredded coconut, or dipped in chocolate), filled crepes, and ***bolas de fraile*** (fried donuts filled with *dulce de leche*). Other popular sweets are flan, ***chajá*** (sponge cake with peaches and whipped cream), ***Martín Fierro*** (a mild cheese topped with sweet quince paste), and ice cream.

### Beverages

Many Uruguayans drink ***yerba mate***, a herbal tea drunk from a gourd and throughout the day. The beverage predates the arrival of the Spanish in Uruguay (see *History and Myth*). Strict social conventions, like thanking the preparer after sipping the *mate* only when one no longer wants to receive the gourd again for another sip, govern its preparation and consumption. Some Uruguayans also drink other tea flavors and coffee, particularly for breakfast. Espresso, ***café cortado*** (sweetened espresso with steamed milk), and ***café con leche*** (strong coffee with hot milk) are common options in ***confiterías*** (pastry shops) and cafés. Fruit juices and grapefruit soda are also popular.

***Bodegas*** (wineries) are popular in Uruguay, and tannat is the most common local type of grape. While Uruguayans often drink red wine with meals, ***medio y medio*** (half sparkling, half white

wine) and ***clérico*** (wine mixed with juice) are also popular. Common spirits are ***caña*** (rum), particularly the brand El Espinillar, tannat liqueur, grappa, and whiskey. Beer is also popular. Uruguay's major domestic brands are Norteña, Pilsen, Patricia, and Zillertal. While pilsners and lagers tend to be the most common beer options, craft brews have become popular in recent years.

### Eating Out

Restaurants in Montevideo range from upscale establishments specializing in international and local cuisine to inexpensive food stalls. Street food is popular, and stalls often sell *empanadas* or sandwich varieties like *choripán*, *chivito*, or ***panchos*** (hotdogs, often with toppings like corn, cheese, crispy potato sticks, mustard, onions, relish, and ***salsa Golf***, a blend of mayo and ketchup). A 10% tip is expected in most dining establishments.

### Health Overview

While the overall health of Uruguayans has improved in recent decades, they continue to face high rates of non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases and other serious health challenges. Between 2000-22, life expectancy at birth increased from about 75 to 78 years, a figure slightly higher than the average of Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries (74) and the US (77). Over the same period, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased from about 15 deaths per 1,000 live births to 6, lower than the LAC average (14) and close to the US rate (5).

### Traditional Medicine

This treatment method consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Uruguayan medicine, known as ***medicina popular*** (folk medicine), relies on herbal treatments and prayer to identify and cure the causes of illness, both physical and spiritual. Today, some Uruguayans use traditional religious and herbal remedies, often based on their grandmothers' knowledge and at times overseen by a ***curandero*** (healer), in addition to modern

Western medicine. Some examples of therapies are diet change and nutritional supplements, energy healing, herbal or botanical teas and medications, and physical therapy. Common examples of plants used in traditional treatments are macela, mint, sage, carqueja, and lemon verbena, among others.


### Healthcare System

Uruguay's healthcare system is based on the idea that health is a basic human right and is the responsibility of the state. The Ministry of Public Health creates policies and oversees various health-related entities. Funded by the ***Fondo Nacional de Salud*** (National Health Fund, or FONASA) to which the government, employers, and employees contribute at set rates, the ***Sistema Nacional Integrado de Salud*** (National Integrated Health System, or SNIS) ensures universal coverage for all residents and integrates public and private providers. Founded in 1987 and modified in 2007, the public ***Administración de los Servicios de Salud del Estado*** (State Health Services Administration, or ASSE) manages preventive care and treatment services at hospitals and healthcare centers across the country. Formal employees, their dependents, and retired residents receive healthcare after having contributed to FONASA and comprise over 70% of users, while ASSE covers health services for the residents who have not contributed.

Those who contribute to FONASA choose one of over 40 private healthcare providers, though many opt for coverage through ASSE, which does not charge user fees. All SNIS providers offer comprehensive coverage that ranges from primary care to hospitalization, mental health, and medications. Prescriptions tend to be affordable, and the government caps the cost of many medications. About 40% of residents receive coverage through ASSE, while about 57% use ***mutualistas*** (private membership plans), and some 3% pay additional fees for private premium service or third-party health insurance plans. These premium services and associated hospitals typically offer more advanced

medical technologies and care. While public and private clinics operate across Uruguay, private hospitals and clinics typically offer a higher standard of care with shorter wait times. The disparity in the accessibility of medical care has led to unequal health outcomes among different segments of the population.

Uruguay has some of the LAC region's highest standards of healthcare and frequently updates its laws to improve healthcare accessibility and coverage. As of 2021, Uruguay spent over 9% of GDP on healthcare, above the LAC average (8%), but below the US rate (17%). Uruguay consistently has one of the world's and LAC region's highest rates of physicians per capita (behind only Cuba). As of 2021, Uruguay has 6.2 physicians per 1,000 people, well above the LAC average (2.3 in 2019), US (3.6 in 2020), and Argentina (3.9 in 2020).

### Healthcare Challenges

Often due to poor diet, tobacco use, and alcohol consumption, the leading causes of death are chronic and non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases, which accounted for over 85% of deaths in 2019. Of these, heart disease, stroke, cancer, Alzheimer's and other dementias, and lung disease are the most common. Preventable "external causes" such as suicides, car accidents, and other injuries resulted in about 7% of deaths, equal to the US rate. Uruguay has one of the LAC's and world's highest suicide rates at 21.2 per 100,000 people, below Guyana (40.3) and Suriname (25.4), but well above Argentina (8.4) and Brazil (6.9), despite ranking as South America's happiest country. The suicide rate is 34.5 for men, compared to 8.9 for women.

National strategies to reduce healthcare inequalities, especially between urban and rural areas, and improve the quality of care, are primary government objectives. As of late 2023, the government confirmed over 1.04 million cases of COVID-19, resulting in over 7,680 deaths. Meanwhile, some 84% of Uruguayans had received at least two doses of a vaccine against COVID-19 and 60% a booster or additional dose.

# 11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

## Overview

Uruguay was populated sparsely during the pre-colonial era (see *History and Myth*) and had hardly any economic activity. Indigenous inhabitants, like the Charrúa, were primarily semi-nomadic peoples, migrating between small inland and coastal settlements. Though the Guaraní, who were based in present-day Paraguay, established extensive trade networks throughout the surrounding region, few traversed Uruguay.

In 1603, Spanish colonists introduced livestock to Uruguay when they released cattle and horses on the empty plains that today comprise the nation's interior (see *History and Myth*). The warm temperate climate and extensive ***pampas*** (treeless plains) allowed the cattle to thrive, and by the early 1700s, millions grazed the Uruguayan plains. As Spanish and Portuguese settlements proliferated throughout the region, a leather industry developed, and hides became colonial Uruguay's main export.

Established in 1726, Montevideo grew rapidly into Uruguay's primary commercial center. Its deep harbor provided for a bustling seaport that facilitated international trade. Beef and leather from the Uruguayan interior were exported through the city, which also served as a major entry point for enslaved Africans brought to Spanish South America (see *History and Myth*).

The city's emergent commercial elite profited significantly from these activities. By the early 19th century, Uruguay had developed a close trade relationship with Britain, which brought foreign capital to Montevideo. Meanwhile, ***latifundios*** (large estates) and ***estancias*** (parcels of land used to breed livestock), often without clear boundaries and home to enormous herds of cattle, proliferated in the interior, yielding a class of rural elite.

Despite the success of livestock ranching and international exchange, Uruguay's economy was stagnant in the decades following independence in 1828 (see *History and Myth*). Political instability undermined the rural economy as rival factions vied for control of the countryside, stole and slaughtered cattle, and hindered commerce.

Productivity was restored after the conclusion of the Great War in 1852 (see *History and Myth*). Steamships decreased transatlantic transport costs, making Uruguayan goods more competitive in Europe, while new railways reduced domestic transport costs and telegraph networks linked Montevideo to the interior. Innovations in cattle rearing and meatpacking made Uruguayan producers more profitable.

As British wool demand grew, sheep ranching also expanded significantly during this period. By 1870, Uruguay was home to more sheep than cattle, and in 1876, Uruguay achieved a trade surplus for the first time. Exports continued to grow through the turn of the 20th century, bolstered by protectionist policies that supported local sectors. With the introduction of refrigeration in 1900, Uruguay began to ship frozen beef to Europe and the US.

President José Batlle y Ordóñez (1903-07 and 1911-15, see *History and Myth*) significantly reformed the state's role in the economy, empowering it to protect laborers, regulate activity, and become an important producer. Batlle introduced a range of labor reforms (a minimum wage, 6-day workweek, and old-age pensions) that laid the groundwork for a welfare state and helped the middle class.

He also nationalized much of the economy, founding a public insurance company, mortgage bank, energy enterprise, railroad, and utilities providers. During this period, the economy benefitted from global spikes in demand caused by World War I, and exports continued to grow until the late 1920s.

The vulnerabilities of Uruguay's export-reliant economy became apparent during the Great Depression, when global demand plummeted, and national export income contracted by some 40%. Although demand spikes caused by World War II and the Korean War briefly restored growth, supply issues constrained the economy. Beef and wool production stagnated as vacant land dwindled. Post-Depression policies designed to diversify national production away from primary products, reduce imports, and increase employment helped cause a brief industrial boom that prevented economic collapse. Protected by tariffs, bolstered by a plentiful urban labor supply, and facilitated by available capital, Uruguayan industry developed rapidly. Between 1930-55, the number of Uruguayan firms tripled, and various heavy industries emerged. During this period, the country achieved significant wealth and briefly became known as the "Switzerland of South America" (see *History and Myth*).

However, by the mid-1950s, industrial imports stagnated, and the end of the industrialization boom ushered in a protracted crisis that unfolded over the following 2 decades. As livestock production and industry faltered, the state assumed the burden of the fragile economy. State enterprises expanded, supported by growing foreign debt. As a result, foreign currency reserves decreased and inflation surged, reaching 125% in 1968. Dissatisfaction with the economy contributed to the military's seizure of power in 1973 (see *History and Myth*).

Uruguay's military dictatorship sought to remedy the economy. Between 1974-78, it cut the public budget, closely managed the money supply, replaced the currency, and limited wage growth, thereby reducing inflation. It also eliminated price controls, lowered tariffs, subsidized exports, and liberalized foreign exchange and financial markets, causing production and exports to surge and yielding robust growth. Nevertheless, the military was dissatisfied with the pace of recovery and implemented additional reforms in 1978 that disrupted the ongoing

stabilization efforts. Inflation surged as banks made risky loans, causing a banking crisis. Foreign debt grew as rising global prices on oil harmed Uruguay's trade balance and yielded a public debt crisis. These crises led to a recession: Uruguay's GDP shrank by 9.4% in 1982.

Between 1982-85, a stabilization plan that restructured private debt and devalued the new peso (then Uruguay's currency) helped normalize the economy. In the 1990s, the government enacted reforms to ensure stability and combat persistent inflation. In 1993, it introduced the Uruguayan peso. Adjustments to fiscal and monetary policy helped lower inflation, which fell below 10% in 1998 for the first time in 3 decades. This period also saw increased regional trade liberalization, as Uruguay joined the Southern Common Market (Mercosur, see *Political and Social Relations*) at its outset in 1991, which contributed to its economic growth.


However, from 1998-2002, the Argentine Great Depression caused a run on banks in Uruguay that depleted its foreign currency reserves. In response, Uruguay abandoned its exchange rate commitment, threatening its public debt service. The country's GDP fell by more than half, to $12 billion during this period. However, adept management of the run on banks, a loan from the US, stabilization of the exchange rate, and debt restructuring ended the crisis by late 2003 (see *History and Myth*). From 2004-14, the economy grew from $14-62 billion, but a growing deficit and rising inflation hampered growth thereafter.

Uruguay's economy was also hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, and its GDP shrank by 6.3% in 2020. Despite a robust recovery, Uruguay's unemployment rate was over 8% in 2023, high by global standards, and its debt-to-GDP ratio is relatively high at over 61%. Nevertheless, Uruguay is South America's 8th largest economy, with GDP of about $77 billion as of 2023, and its GDP per capita is Latin America's highest at $22,564. Likewise, Uruguay's poverty rate was only about 10%.

### Services

Comprising around 63% of GDP and 73% of employment in 2022 and 2021 respectively, the services sector is Uruguay's largest. Major subsectors are tourism, technology, and banking.

**Tourism:** This sub-sector is one of the most important, accounting for around 7% of GDP. In 2019, some 3.5 million tourists visited Uruguay. Attractions like Punta del Este's and other resort towns' beaches, Montevideo's museums and markets, and Salto's hot springs attract visitors, primarily from South America.


**Technology:** Sometimes called the "Silicon Valley of South America," Uruguay is a global leader in digital technologies. It ranks third globally in per-capita software exports (primarily purchased by the US) and has some 700 information technology firms. In 2022, subsector revenues totaled some $2.8 billion, or around 4% of GDP.

**Banking:** Uruguay's banking subsector is highly concentrated, with the government-owned commercial bank ***Banco de la República Oriental*** (Bank of the Oriental Republic) accounting for more than half of total deposits. Subsidiaries of major international banks – including Santander and BBV (Spain), Itaú (Brazil), and Scotiabank (Canada) – account for the remainder of the market. The ***Banco Hipotecario del Uruguay*** (Mortgage Bank of Uruguay) is the largest mortgage lender.

### Industry

The industrial sector accounts for about 18% of GDP and employs 19% of the workforce. Key subsectors are food processing, preparation, and preservation and manufacturing.

**Food Processing:** About half of Uruguay's industrial sector is engaged in food processing, preparation, and preservation. Preparing beef – Uruguay's primary export product – for sale is the most significant processing activity. The country's largest slaughterhouses process some 1,000 cattle daily.

## Agriculture

This sector comprises around 7% of GDP and 8% of the labor force. Nearly 12% of Uruguay's land is arable. Livestock rearing, forestry, and farming are the principal agricultural activities.

**Livestock and Farming:** Uruguay produces a vast amount of beef for its size, and cattle outnumber humans by about four to one. The country produces between 450,000-650,000 tons of carcass weight and exports some 60-75% of its output annually. Uruguay also produces large quantities of milk, sheep, wool, and lamb, mostly for export. Common crops are soybeans, rice, wheat, barley, corn, grapeseed, oranges, and sugarcane.

**Forestry:** Accounting for about $2 billion of exports in 2019, some of Uruguay's most lucrative forestry products are pulp, sawn wood, and paper.

## Currency

Adopted in 1993, Uruguay uses the Uruguayan peso ($U or UYU), issued in seven banknotes (20, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1,000, and 2,000) and four coins (1, 2, 5, and 10). A peso divides into 100 ***centésimos*** (cents), which are no longer issued. Instead, merchants typically round to the nearest peso when customers pay with cash. From 2019-24, US$1 was worth between $U34.12 – 45.79.


## Foreign Trade

Exports, which totaled some $12 billion in 2022, consisted of frozen beef, wood pulp, soybeans, concentrated milk, and rice, sold to China (24%), Brazil (14%), Argentina (8%), and the US (7%), among others. Imports totaled about $14.5 billion and consisted of crude petroleum, cars, packaged medicaments, broadcasting equipment, and delivery trucks from Brazil (20%), China (18%), the US (15%), Argentina (11%), among others.

## Foreign Aid

Uruguay is a recipient of foreign aid, which primarily supports counter-trafficking and disaster-response efforts. In 2017, Uruguay received $41 million of official development assistance.

# 12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

**Overview**

Although Uruguay's road infrastructure is well-developed, it lacks effective rail connections and some other public transport services. Its media environment is free but concentrated.

**Transportation**

Most Uruguayans travel by bus or car in cities and over long distances. Many families own or have access to a vehicle. Bus fares vary by service type, though local routes are generally inexpensive, and service is frequent. Taxis and rideshare services – like Uber and Cabify – are common in urban areas. In rural areas, ***remís*** (fixed-rate chauffeured vehicles that residents must book in advance by phone or in person) are popular. Montevideo has no subway or light rail network. As a result, its bus networks transport around a million passengers daily. Private ferry services link both Montevideo and Colonia del Sacramento to Buenos Aires, Argentina across the ***Río de la Plata*** (River of Silver, or "River Plate"). Nationwide, travel by foot, bicycle, and motorbike is also common.

**Roadways:** Only around 10% of Uruguay's 48,000-mi roadway network is paved. The network is densest in the South, around Montevideo, and West, along the route to Salto, but becomes sparse in the country's interior. Several international corridors, primarily originating in Montevideo, connect Uruguay to Argentina and Brazil. In a 2019 global assessment, Uruguay ranked 25 of 141 countries in road connectivity and 86 in quality of road infrastructure.

**Railways:** Although Uruguay has 1,840 mi of railways, much of the network (nearly 800 mi) is in disrepair. The country's only passenger line connects the northern cities of Rivera and Tacuarembó, as most railways transport only freight traffic. The ***Administración de Ferrocarriles del Estado*** (State Railways

Administration) manages Uruguay's railways and has plans to improve its rail infrastructure. The ***Ferrocarril Central*** (Central Railway), which opened in 2024 and runs from the central Paso de Los Toros to Montevideo, supports only freight traffic as of mid-2024, though passenger service is planned for the route.

**Ports and Waterways:** Uruguay has around 1,000 mi of navigable waterways, including several river systems. The ***Río Negro*** (Black River) bisects the country from the Uruguay River (which forms the border between Uruguay and Argentina) to Brazil. Much of Uruguay's international trade passes through its seaports, of which the most significant is Montevideo.

**Airways:** As of 2024, Uruguay has 64 airports, of which 11 are paved. Carrasco/General Cesáreo L. Berisso International Airport in Montevideo is Uruguay's primary air transit hub, handling some 2 million passengers per year. This airport was the base for Uruguay's flag carrier, PLUNA (officially ***Primeras Líneas Uruguayas de Navegación Aérea***, or First Uruguayan Air Navigation Lines), until its liquidation in 2012. In 2024, the government reached a deal with newly founded, privately owned ***Sociedad Uruguaya de Aviación*** (Uruguayan Aviation Society) to become the national carrier. It is set to begin service sometime in 2025.

## Energy

Uruguay imports all its oil and gas requirements. The state-owned ***Administración Nacional de Combustibles, Alcoholes y Portland*** (National Administration of Fuels, Alcohols, and Portland, or ANCAP) controls the energy sector, managing imports, operating the country's only refinery, and distributing gas. Though Uruguay has no proven oil or gas deposits, ANCAP issued offshore exploration licenses between 2021-24. In 2021, oil comprised about 44% of Uruguay's total energy supply, followed by biofuels and waste (39%), wind and solar (8%), hydroelectric power (8%), natural gas (1.2%), and coal (0.1%). However, nearly 90% of electricity production is from renewable sources: wind, hydropower, and biofuels as the most prevalent.

## Media

Uruguay's media landscape is diverse, though a few private firms wield substantial influence, especially in the television sector. The Uruguayan press has legal protections, particularly a constitutional right to free media. While an open information environment facilitates journalism, in recent years, the government has been hostile to opposition journalists, who are sometimes subject to threats, intimidation, and legal pressure. Uruguay ranked 51 of 180 countries in a 2024 world press freedom index and placed third among Latin American nations, behind Costa Rica (26) and the Dominican Republic (35).


**Print Media:** First published in 1918, Montevideo-based *El País* is Uruguay's most widely circulated newspaper. *El Observador* and *La República,* also based in Montevideo, are other major papers. *MercoPress* is Uruguay's primary English-language newspaper.

**TV and Radio:** Three commercial groups owned by prominent Uruguayan families (Cardoso-Scheck, Fontaina-De Feo, and Salvo-Romay) have long dominated the TV sector. Each group owns one of the most-viewed channels: *Teledoce* (Cardoso-Scheck), *Canal 10* (Fontaina-De Feo), and *Canal 4* (Salvo-Romay). The radio landscape is more diverse, with government-owned *Radiodifusion Nacional SODRE* broadcasting alongside private stations like *Radio El Espectador* and *Radio Sarandi*.

## Telecommunications

As of 2021, Uruguay has about 139 mobile subscriptions and 37 landlines per 100 inhabitants. Coverage is widespread in populated regions but sparse throughout Uruguay's largely uninhabited interior (see *Political and Social Relations*). Uruguay has extensive plans to expand its 5G network.

**Internet:** Some 90% of Uruguay's population (around 3 million people) were regular Internet users in 2021. Uruguay had about 31 broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in 2020, though many Uruguayans access the Internet via mobile devices.

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