

## Uruguay

**Country:**Uruguay**Year:**

2016

**Freedom Status:**

Free

**Political Rights:**

1

**Civil Liberties:**

1

**Aggregate Score:**

98

**Freedom Rating:**

1.0

**Overview:**

In March 2015, the leftist Broad Front (Frente Amplio) coalition—which won a majority in general elections in 2014—entered a new term in office. Tabaré Vázquez, who ran as the Frente Amplio presidential candidate, returned to the office for a second nonconsecutive term. Uruguay is one of the most stable and peaceful countries in the region, and during the year, authorities made attempts to address some persisting human rights concerns, particularly human trafficking and conditions in detention facilities.

**Political Rights and Civil Liberties:****Political Rights: 40 / 40 [Key]****A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12**

The 1967 constitution established a bicameral General Assembly consisting of the 99-member Chamber of Representatives and the 30-member Senate, with all members directly elected for five-year terms. The president is directly elected for a single five-year term.

The most recent general elections were held in October 2014. The Frente Amplio retained a majority in the parliament, winning 50 seats in the Chamber of Representatives and 15 seats in the Senate. The National Party placed second with 32 and 10 seats in the respective houses, followed by Colorado with 13 and 4 seats; Popular Assembly and the Independent Party took the remaining seats. The Tabaré Vázquez–Raúl Sendic ticket of the Frente Amplio captured the presidency after a run-off in November. Vázquez, who served as the country's first leftist president from 2005 to 2010, returned to the presidential seat in March 2015 with Sendic as his vice president; the constitution bans consecutive presidential terms.

## **B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16**

Uruguay's multiparty system is open and competitive. The major political parties are the Colorado Party, the National Party (also known as Blanco), the Independent Party, and the Frente Amplio coalition, the latter of which is currently in power. Frente Amplio includes the Popular Participation Movement, the New Space Party, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the Uruguayan Assembly, among other factions.

The small Afro-Uruguayan minority, comprising approximately 8 percent of the population, is severely underrepresented in government. Representation of women in national, regional, and local government is also low, although a gender quota system was implemented in the most recent elections to increase the participation of women as candidates.

## **C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12**

The level of corruption in Uruguay is relatively low compared to regional standards, and government institutions have established a fairly strong record of accountability to the electorate. Uruguay was ranked 21 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Enforcement of the country's Transparency Law, which prohibits a range of offenses related to abuse of office, is relatively strong at the national level. Some challenges in establishing transparent practices—including limited online resources available to the public—remain at the regional level. The law provides for access to public information, and authorities generally comply with requests.

## **Civil Liberties: 58 / 60**

### **D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16**

Constitutional guarantees regarding free expression are respected, and violations of press freedom are rare. The press is privately owned; the broadcast sector includes both commercial and public outlets. There are numerous daily and weekly newspapers, some of which are connected to political parties. A 2009 law eliminated criminal penalties for the defamation of public officials. The government does not place restrictions on internet usage or monitor private online communications without proper legal permission.

Freedom of religion is legally protected and broadly respected. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of anti-Semitic attacks in 2015.

The government does not restrict academic freedom. Private discussion is open and vibrant.

### **E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12**

Freedoms of assembly and association are protected by law, and the government generally respects these rights in practice. A wide array of community organizations are active in civic life. In September, police clashed with student demonstrators who were advocating for increased public spending on education.

Workers are free to exercise the right to join unions, bargain collectively, and hold strikes. Unions are well organized and politically powerful. In August, there was a significant dispute between members of teachers' unions, who went on strike to demand higher wages and a larger education budget, and the president, who issued a decree that teachers constituted an "essential service" and could not continue the strike. Vázquez shortly revoked the decree, but the unions suspended the strike after 15 days without reaching an agreement with the government.

#### **F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16**

The judiciary is mostly independent, but the court system remains severely backlogged. More than 60 percent of the prison population consists of people awaiting trials. Overcrowded detention facilities, poor sanitary conditions, and violence among inmates remain serious problems. The prison system held approximately 109 percent of its intended capacity as of October 2015, a decrease from 120 percent in 2014. Medical care for prisoners is substandard, and many rely on visitors for food. The recidivism rate is approximately 60 percent. In 2015, the United Nations helped the government launch a program for improving the treatment of juvenile offenders, whose detentions are administered by the System of Penal Responsibility for Adolescents (SIRPA).

Efforts to seek justice for human rights violations committed under the military regime that ended in 1985 have been inconsistent. Although 2011 legislation enabled trials regardless of a prior amnesty law by removing a statute of limitations, the Supreme Court declared in 2013 that the 2011 law was unconstitutional; the decision prompted concerns about impunity. In February 2015, Vazquez announced that he intended to create a truth commission to shed light on the crimes of the dictatorship, and issued a presidential decree on the establishment of this body in May.

Uruguay has historically been one of the most peaceful countries in the region. The homicide rate was only 8 per 100,000 people in 2015, but nevertheless marked an exception—the total of 274 homicides reported as of December made 2015 the deadliest year recorded. Officials have attributed the steady rise in crime over the past few years to warring drug gangs, as Uruguay has become an increasingly important transit point for the narcotics trade. Police are pushing for more expansive laws to battle increasing violent crimes. Currently, officers are only allowed to shoot if they have already been subject to gunfire, and can only shoot suspects who are facing them.

Uruguay continued to receive international scrutiny for agreeing to resettle six detainees released from the notorious U.S. military prison in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The six men, who arrived in Uruguay in December 2014 as refugees, expressed concerns in 2015 about meagre job opportunities and living standards. In April, four of the former detainees staged a protest outside the U.S. embassy in Montevideo to demand that the U.S. government take responsibility for their care.

The Afro-Uruguayan minority continues to face economic and social inequalities. A 2013 affirmative action law includes incentives to increase graduation rates and an 8 percent quota in government employment, but implementation has been slow.

#### **G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16**

Freedom of movement is protected, and individuals are generally free to choose their residence, employment, and institution of higher education without interference.

There is a high level of social inclusion in the country, though some problems remain. Women enjoy equal rights under the law but face discriminatory traditional attitudes and practices, including a persisting wage gap. Women hold 16 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Representatives and

29 percent in the Senate. Women comprise approximately 25 percent of the armed forces—much higher than the regional average for Latin American countries, which stands at 4 percent. Violence against women remains a serious concern, with the government reporting that 7 out of 10 women in Uruguay suffer some kind of violence.

The parliament approved same-sex civil unions in 2007, legalized abortion for any reason during the first trimester in 2012, and voted overwhelmingly to legalize same-sex marriage in 2013.

In 2012, Uruguay became the first country in the world to ratify the Domestic Workers Convention, which outlines domestic workers' core labor rights. According to the U.S. State Department's 2016 *Trafficking in Persons* report, the government of Uruguay does not meet the minimum international standards for combatting human trafficking, but continues to make improvements. The report criticized trafficking legislation for defining the offense only in a transnational sense, and noted that there are few resources available to victims.

### **Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)**

**X = Score Received**

**Y = Best Possible Score**

**Z = Change from Previous Year**

### **Full Methodology**

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