

Uruguay

The Uruguayan constitution and other laws and policies generally protect and respect freedom of religion or belief. With a long tradition of secularism, Uruguay is the most socially secular nation in Latin America.

Constitution and government	Education and children's rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
<u>State-funding of religious institutions or salaries, or discriminatory tax exemptions</u>			
	<u>No formal discrimination in education</u>	<u>No religious tribunals of concern, secular groups operate freely, individuals are not persecuted by the state</u>	<u>No fundamental restrictions on freedom of expression or advocacy of humanist values</u>

Legend

Constitution and government

The constitution in Uruguay and numerous laws explicitly prohibits discrimination based on religion. There is strict division of church and state. The penal code restricts ill-treatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. The *Institución Nacional de Derechos Humanos* (National Institute of Human Rights) an autonomous branch of Congress designed to defend, promote, and protect the human rights recognized by the Constitution and international law, and the Ministry of Education and Culture's (MEC) Honorary Commission against Racism, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination enforce government compliance with the laws. Furthermore, Representatives from numerous religious and civil society bodies are actively involved in the Honorary Commission.

Education and children's rights

Uruguay prohibits religious instruction in its public schools. Public schools allow students belonging to minority religious groups to take time off school for religious holidays without being penalised. However, it remains to be seen whether secular or humanist families would be permitted similar treatment (they are not explicitly included in the law as it stands).

Family, community and society

Secularization and progressive values

A report by Pew Research Center, *Religion in Latin America : Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region* (November 2014) found that Uruguay had the highest level of persons unaffiliated to religion in Latin America:

"...Uruguay is an outlier, far and away Latin America's most secular country. Fully 37% of Uruguayans say that they have no particular religion or are atheist or agnostic. In no other Latin American country surveyed do the religiously unaffiliated make up even 20% of the population.

Laicidad, or the separation of religion and the state, has a long history in Uruguay. In 1861, the government nationalized cemeteries across the country, breaking their affiliations with churches. Soon after, the government prohibited churches from having a role in public education or issuing marriage certificates. Secularization continued in the 20th century: A new constitution enshrined the separation of religion from public life, references to God were removed from the parliamentary oath and religious references were dropped from the names of cities and villages.

Today, Uruguay has by far the lowest levels of religious commitment among the countries polled. Fewer than a third of Uruguayans (28%) say that religion is very important in their lives ..."

<http://www.pewforum.org/files/2014/11/Religion-in-Latin-America-11-12-PM-full-PDF.pdf>

The same report found that Uruguay scored highly in liberal and progressive measures, including tolerance of same-sex relationships, and "it is the only country in the region where a majority (57%) says that religious leaders should have "no influence at all" in political matters." (ibid.)

Some deviations from *Laicidad*

Despite Uruguay's generally good record on church-state separation, there are tax exemptions permitted to religious groups for houses of worship. In order to receive such exemptions, a religious group must first register with the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) as a non-profit entity and submit draft organising statutes.

In general terms Uruguay has low influence from religious groups in politics, however, given the tax exemptions religious groups both Catholics and Protestants are establishing and have influence, especially among lower income people. A coalition of pastors put a lot of money into one branch of the Blanco Party and have attained representation, with a deputy and a Senator.

subrayado.com.uy/Site/noticia/38696/conozca-al-pastor-que-asumira-como-diputado-por-el-partido-nacional

Muslims in the country are permitted to acquire an optional identity card that identifies their religious affiliation to employers and permits them to withdraw from work early on Fridays. This might be described as enabling a positive religious freedom, but it is also a privilege not permitted to other belief groups on analogous grounds.

Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values

Rights to freedom of assembly and association are guaranteed by law, and the government generally respects this in practice. A broad range of community organizations are active in civic life in the country, including many groups focussed on women's rights for which campaigning aims to raise particular awareness of such issues as violence against women and societal discrimination.

Uruguay's constitution guarantees free expression are generally this is respected, and violations of press freedom are uncommon. The press in Uruguay is privately owned and there are numerous daily newspapers, many of which have affiliations with political parties.

A 2009 law removed criminal penalties for the defamation of public officials. President Mujica sent a draft Broadcasting Communication Services Law (LSCA) to the parliament in May 2013; the bill included provisions limiting broadcast monopolies, more transparent licensing procedures, protection against censorship, and a requirement that at least 60 percent of the programmes on each channel be produced or co-produced in the country. The bill passed in December 2013, and was welcomed by campaigners:

“The LSCA takes pains to guarantee that the concentration of broadcast media ownership is reduced and that frequencies are redistributed fairly, without any control on content and without pressure on the editorial policies of the public, commercial or community media concerned...”

— Reporters Without Borders
<en.rsf.org/uruguay>

The government of Uruguay does not restrict academic freedom nor does it place restrictions on internet usage.

A humanist president?

Uruguay’s democratically-elected president, José Mujica, a self-described atheist, has been popularly and internationally lauded as the world’s “humblest” leader, for foregoing presidential luxuries and giving away 90% of his modest presidential salary to charity.

Mujica’s presidency has seen several reforms widely applauded by progressives, including the liberalization of abortion, the introduction of same-sex marriage, and the legalization of marijuana use. Asked about the reforms, Mujica said, “Yes, we have an innovatory spirit, deeply rooted in our history... We’re a country of immigrants, anarchists and persecuted people from all over the world. The result is the most secular country in Latin America, with a clear distinction between church and state. For my part, I’m president but I don’t believe in God.”

<theguardian.com/world/2014/may/27/jose-mujica-uruguay-maverick-president>

At his inauguration, Mujica said, “it is a mistake to think that power comes from above, when it comes from within the hearts of the masses...” <laverdad.es/murcia/20091130/mundo/jose-mujica-gana-elecciones-200911300003.html>

In his September 2013 speech to the United Nations General Assembly, Mujica eulogized about humanity and globalization, emphasising climate change and the global responsibility to future generations, saying “the world cries out for global rules that respect the achievements of science.” He said that humanity has “sacrificed the old immaterial Gods, and now we are occupying the temple of the Market-God”, with all its power to wreak havoc on the lives of ordinary people. He urged a return to lives founded on human relationships, love, friendship, adventure, solidarity and family, instead of lives shackled to the economy and the markets. He concluded that poverty could be eliminated from the planet if only future generations could begin to reason as a species, not just as individuals.

<gadebate.un.org/68/uruguay>

<un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45989#.VGn5lfnkcwp>

Testimonies

“The elections validated the big reforms that the Mujica government undertook on abortion, same sex marriage and marijuana. We expect to continue being an example of secular society

improving in Latin America.”

— An Uruguayan humanist