



Uruguay — Va-PoReg Country Report

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07/18/1830 Start Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy: Uruguay's Independence from the Empire of Brazil was declared on 08/05/1825 and Uruguay joined a union with the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata (current Argentina). The Treaty of Montevideo was signed on 08/27/1828, recognizing Uruguay's independence by Brazil. On 07/18/1830 the Constitution of 1830 was approved.¹ On 07/19/1870, Uruguay's independence was recognized by Spain. On 11/26/1901, parliamentary elections were held. Suffrage was limited to literate men. Voting was not secret, as voters had to sign their ballot paper.² In 1903 Batlle y Ordóñez won the presidency by a slim margin, sparking tensions with the opposing Blanco Party and triggering a civil war in 1904. Following the conflict, Batlle y Ordóñez and his supporters emerged triumphant in 1905, securing the Colorado Party's uncontested authority. In 1905, he conducted fair presidential and legislative elections, which he and his party secured. Upon completing his term in 1907, he willingly relinquished the presidency, although he remained involved in selecting his party's next presidential nominee.³ The parliamentary elections on 11/09/1910 were the first after introducing the "double simultaneous vote" or "Lema Law", whereby all representative organs (president, chamber of deputies, senate) were elected with one single ballot and vote. This electoral system made it difficult for new parties to attain lema (or party) status and promoted the vote for the Colorados and Blancos, the two traditional parties in Uruguay (Nohlen 2005). Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Elections are acknowledged as competitive since 1903 (LIED). V-Dem's CEI indicates an ambiguous cleanliness of elections from 1900 to 1904 and indicates that between 1905 and 1915 the elections were not really clean. In 1916 they scored ambiguous cleanliness. From 1917 to 1919 somewhat cleanliness is attained. V-Dem's EF&FI indicates the overall election conditions as somewhat free and fair until 1906. The following two years the elections conditions were ambiguous. In 1910 the elections returned to being somewhat free and fair for three years. Between 1913 and 1915 the outcomes were ambiguous again. Since 1916, the elections are considered as free and fair. However, according to LIED, political liberties were absent for the entire period. Whereas V-Dem's PCLI already scores full political liberties. According to Polity5, from 1900 to 1903, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1904 to 1909, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. From 1910 to 1918, the executive's constraints were categorized as Intermediate Category 2, between slight and substantial limitations. In 1919, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

11/25/1917 End Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy/Start Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal): On this date, a referendum was held approving the second Constitution of Uruguay, thus, for our regime change events, we code a strategic restructuring for this day.⁴ On 11/27/1919 the first parliamentary elections with universal male suffrage took place after it was introduced with the 1918 Uruguayan Constitution. In the same year, the financial requirements for candidacy for the president, the senate, or the chamber of representatives were abolished (Nohlen 2005). On 12/16/1932, female suffrage was declared a law.⁵ However, in this regime period no elections with female participation took place. Gabriel Terra had been elected president in 1930, a

position that did not offer much authority. Executive power rested with the nine person Consejo Nacional de Administracion, CNA). Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During the entire period the elections were competitive (LIED). Still, V-Dem's CEI indicates somewhat cleanliness from 1919 to 1924, before cleanliness was scored the following year. Since 1919, the country's elections were free and fair according to V-Dem's EF&FI. LIED remained its absent score regarding the political liberties. Whereas V-Dem's PCLI still indicates full political liberties until 1933, when it indicates an ambiguous state.⁶ As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks during this time. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

03/31/1933 End Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal)/Start Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy: On this day, Terra orchestrated an autogolpe with the backing of the National Police, under the leadership of Baldomir Ferrari, and the Armed Forces, leading to the dissolution of the CNA. Terra's regime implemented press censorship and cracked down on opposition factions (Casey et al. 2020: 17, Finch 1991: 197-99).⁷ On 04/19/1934, the third constitution of Uruguay was adopted in a referendum, which abolished the colegiado (nine-member executive), reinstated a presidential system, and introduced universal adult suffrage. In the same year, the Electoral Court gained constitutional status (Nohlen 2005). According to LIED, both executive and legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty, which contradicts our observations that they were multiparty. During this time the held elections were not considered as competitive per LIED. However, the elections can be interpreted as somewhat clean from 1934 to 1938 according to V-Dem's CEI. We would argue that in this case the expert judgements by V-Dem are wrong and we side with LIED and the qualitative judgements in the literature. Regarding the political liberties, LIED underlines they were not present. V-Dem's PCLI considers political liberties to be ambiguous for this regime period. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. Since 1935, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

06/19/1938 End Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: On 06/19/1938, Terra was defeated in the election and subsequently stepped down (Casey et al. 2020: 17, Finch 1991: 200). This was the first election in which women participated. Terra's brother-in-law, General Alfredo Baldomir, was elected to the presidency in these general elections until 03/01/1943.⁸ Pressured by opposition, organized labor and National Party, Baldomir advocated free elections, freedom of the press, and a new constitution.⁹ On 11/29/1942 Baldomir dissolved the General Assembly and established the Council of State (Consejo de Estado), consisting of Batllists and other members of the Colorado Party.¹⁰ The new constitution of 1942 made it possible for political parties to act freely.¹¹ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 1938, the elections were competitive again, according to LIED. V-Dem's CEI indicates a somewhat cleanliness. In addition, the overall conditions were still classified as somewhat free and fair (V-Dem EF&FI). This regime period is classified as an electoral democracy as it marks the end of the autocratic Terra Era and is characterized by enhancements in the guarantee of democratic principles. Political liberties remained absent according to LIED except between 1944 and 1958 they were present. V-Dem's PCLI outcomes switched to somewhat political liberties until 1941. V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are present until 1967. V-Dem's PCLI indicates them as somewhat present until 1970, in an ambiguous state for 1971-1972, and not really present for 1973. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. The general elections on 11/29/1942 saw Amézaga from the Colorado Party emerge as winner. He became president on 03/01/1943.¹² He restored civil liberties and promoted economic development and the welfare state.¹³ The slogan "There's no place like Uruguay" is

characteristic for this period.¹⁴ In 1946 general elections took place. Tomás Berreta was elected and took office on 03/01/1947.¹⁵ After his death in August 1947 his vice president Luis Battle Berres took office.¹⁶ The constitution of 1952 promulgated a system of collective presidency, called National Council of Government.¹⁷ It remained in place until 1966, when a new constitution reinstated the presidential system.¹⁸ The National Council of Government (Spanish: Consejo Nacional de Gobierno) was the ruling body in Uruguay between 1952 and 1967. It consisted of nine members, of which six were from the party that received the most votes in general elections, and three from the runner-up party.¹⁹ However, due to its poor performance the body was abolished through a referendum on 11/27/1966 and Diego Gestido elected president. On 02/15/1967, the presidential system was reestablished through the adoption of a new constitution.²⁰ Since the democratic transition the elections score competitiveness for the entire time (LIED). The elections are classified as clean by V-Dem's CEI, and the overall election conditions are free and fair during this period. Based on Polity5's assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power from 1942 to 1951. From 1952 to 1967, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. Until 1942, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. Between 1943 and 1949 and from 1968 to 1972, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. For the remaining years, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. On 12/06/1967, Vice President Jorge Pacheco Areco succeeded President Diego Gestido, who had passed away six months after taking office. Pacheco implemented repressive measures, including banning the Socialist Party, suppressing leftist organizations, and cracking down on labor unions. His repressive politics and high inflation contributed to the emergence of the left-wing Tupamamros guerrilla group, initiating armed resistance against the political system in Uruguay (Nohlen 2005). Consequently, Pacheco declared a state of emergency on 06/13/1968, and the armed forces created the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Junta de Comandantes en Jefe y el Estado Mayor Conjunto), who were granted complete independence from the Ministry of Defense.²¹ On 11/28/1971, Juan María Bordaberry Arocena was elected constitutional president.²² He began his presidency while institutional crisis occurred caused by authoritarian figures and terrorist threats.²³ Bordaberry augmented the authority structures established by his predecessor, implementing measures such as the suspension of civil liberties, the prohibition of labor unions, and the detention and elimination of opposition figures.²⁴ On 04/15/1972, the legislative body consented to proclaiming a "state of internal war" in reaction to the Tupamaro guerrillas. This declaration curtailed civil liberties, permitted civilians to be judged in military tribunals, and authorized the military to establish detention facilities for individuals charged with political offenses (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 104). Per FH, for 1972, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. LIED considers the elections as competitive. According to V-Dem's CEI, the elections remained clean until 1972. Moreover, the elections were still free and fair up to the year 1970 before they are classified as somewhat free and fair by V-Dem's EF&FI. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks from 1967 to 1970. There is no data by Polity5 for the years 1971 and 1972.

06/27/1973 End Electoral Democracy/Start Military Autocracy: Upset over the appointment of a civilian defense minister, the investigation of claims of torture against military officers of the legislature, and the course of the war against the leftist insurgency the armed forces threatened a coup. In February 1973, succumbing to military pressure, the elected president acquiesced to establishing a National Security Council (Cosena). This council comprised the commanders of the three military branches, an extra officer, and the Ministers of Defense, Interior, Economy, and Foreign Affairs, along with the president. Its role was to provide advice on policy, essentially formalizing the informal veto power held by the military (GWF Codebook: 104-105). On 06/27/1973, President Juan María Bordaberry launched with the military a coup against the other civilian power entities including the legislature and the constitution itself. He ruled by decree and by the

military-based National Security Council advisory board. The coup was legitimized by the official explanation that it was necessary to crush a Marxist guerrilla group (Tupamaros) (Kaufman 1979: 113-15, Weinstein 1988: 44-50, Jacob/Weinstein 1992, Arceneaux 2001: 185-88). Real power was held by the Junta de Oficiales Generales, made up 18-28 top officers from the three services, which "dominated critical military and government policy decisions" and the Junta de Comandantes en Jefe, the junta of service commanders (Arceneaux 2001: 190, Weinstein 1988: 50, Gillespie 1984: 99). According to LIED, only executive elections were held until 1975, but they were not categorized as multiparty. No legislative elections were present. On 06/12/1976 Bordaberry, who wanted to reform the government into a corporatist system, was dismissed by the military. On 11/30/1980, the military government held a constitutional referendum to legitimize its power, which was rejected by the population. In 1982, the military government allowed the Colorados, the Blancos, and the Unión Cívica to choose new leaders through primary elections. The result confirmed the decline in the military's support and the strengthening of opposition forces within the traditional parties (Nohlen 2005). According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held since 1976. Per FH's evaluation for 1973-1975, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. As classified by FH for 1977-1979, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. According to FH, for the rest of the regime period under consideration, a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI. According to Polity5, from 1973 to 1977, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1978 onward, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints. In this timeframe, V-Dem's JCE is classified as absent, indicating no judicial oversight of the executive. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

08/03/1984 End Military Autocracy/Start Liberal Democracy: In 1984, the military entered formal negotiations with a coalition of center and left parties, resulting in an agreement to hold competitive elections and return power to civilian government (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 67). The negotiations were formalized in the Naval Club Pact, which was agreed upon on 08/03/1984.²⁵ Free and fair general elections on 11/25/1984 led to a democratically elected government. Julio María Sanguinetti from the Colorado Party won the presidency and served as president from 03/01/1985 to 01/03/1990. Luis Alberto Lacalle from the National Party served as president from 03/01/1990 to 03/01/1995. Sanguinetti won another presidential term from 03/01/1995 to 03/01/2000. A constitutional referendum passed on 12/08/1996 now limits each party to a single presidential candidate.²⁶ Additionally, reforms introduced a majoritarian two-round system for the presidential election, with candidates required to reach 50% of the vote to win in the first round, or alternatively win the popular vote in a second round against the second-place candidate.²⁷ Under these new conditions, Jorge Luis Batlle Ibanez won the runoff to the presidential elections in 11/1999 and served as president from 03/01/2000 to 03/01/2005. On 10/31/2004 a referendum passed amending the constitution to include a statement that access to water and sanitation were human rights.²⁸ José Mujica from the political coalition Broad Front took the presidential office from 03/01/2010 to 03/01/2015. The Broad Front continued to hold the presidential office following the next election cycle, with Tabaré Vázquez in office from 03/01/2015 to 03/01/2020.²⁹ Uruguay is, for instance, by the EIU rated as a "full democracy" in 2019. Uruguay operates as a presidential democracy with a bicameral legislature. The political landscape is characterized by a multiparty system.³⁰ Uruguay possesses a robust historical framework for democratic governance and has consistently demonstrated a commitment to preserving political freedoms and civil liberties while actively promoting social inclusivity. Despite legal equality for all citizens, discrepancies persist in the treatment and political representation of women and the Indigenous community.³¹ According to FH, for the assessed regime period, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. Therefore, both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI acknowledge the presence of political liberties since 1985. On 10/27/2019 general elections took place to elect the President and the General Assembly. Following an

absence of a majority winner in the initial voting round, a runoff election was conducted on 11/24/2019. The final vote counts confirmed Lacalle Pou (National Party) as the victor over Martinez (Broad Front). The elections represented the Broad Front's first defeat in a presidential election since 1999.³² General elections were held on 10/27/2024. With incumbent President Luis Lacalle Pou constitutionally barred from seeking immediate re-election, the first round saw the left-wing Broad Front (Frente Amplio) secure the largest share of votes and gain control of the legislature. As no presidential candidate achieved an absolute majority, a runoff was triggered between the Broad Front's Yamandú Orsi and the Republican Coalition's Álvaro Delgado. In the final vote on 11/24/2024, Yamandú Orsi successfully defeated Delgado with 52.00% of the vote. This outcome marked the return of the Broad Front to the presidency, ending five years of center-right government and signaling a shift in the country's political direction.³³ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Ever since 1985 elections score competitiveness (LIED). Moreover, V-Dem's CEI indicates electoral cleanliness for the entire time and the elections are free and fair according to V-Dem's EF&FI. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. Until 1986, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. For the remaining years, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Collier/Collier 2002, Finch 1989, Fitzgibbon 1954, Gillespie/González 1999, González/Gillespie 1994, Taylor 1951, Taylor 1952, Taylor 1984, Wagner 2006, Weinstein 1975, Weinstein 1993)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Uruguay

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1901_Uruguayan_parliamentary_election

³ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jose-Battle-y-Ordonez>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Uruguay_of_1918

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage_in_Uruguay

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel_Terra

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfredo_Baldomir

⁹ <https://countrystudies.us/uruguay/15.htm>

¹⁰ <https://countrystudies.us/uruguay/15.htm>

¹¹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Uruguay/The-struggle-for-national-identity>

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1942_Uruguayan_general_election

¹³ <https://countrystudies.us/uruguay/16.htm>

¹⁴ <https://countrystudies.us/uruguay/16.htm>

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1946_Uruguayan_general_election

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom%C3%A1s_Berreta

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Uruguay_of_1952;
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Council_of_Government_\(Uruguay\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Council_of_Government_(Uruguay))

¹⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Uruguay/The-military-regime>

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1954_Uruguayan_general_election

²⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Council_of_Government_\(Uruguay\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Council_of_Government_(Uruguay))

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civic-military_dictatorship_of_Uruguay

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Mar%C3%ADada_Bordaberry

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Mar%C3%ADada_Bordaberry

- ²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Mar%C3%ADa_Bordaberry
- ²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naval_Club_Pact
- ²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1996_Uruguayan_constitutional_referendum
- ²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999_Uruguayan_general_election
- ²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Uruguayan_constitutional_referendum
- ²⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Uruguay#Recent_history
- ³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Uruguay#:~:text=The%20politics%20of%20Uruguay%20abide,as%20a%20multiform%20party%20system
- ³¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uruguay/freedom-world/2023>
- ³² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Uruguayan_general_election
- ³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Uruguayan_general_election

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