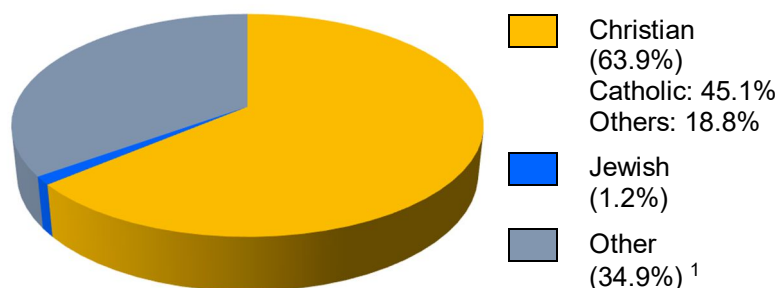


# URUGUAY



Area:	Population <sup>2</sup> :	Political system:	Major Language(s):
176,215 km <sup>2</sup>	3.4 million	Democracy <sup>3</sup>	Spanish <sup>4</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution enshrines the principle that all religions are free, and that the State does not support any of them, in the sense that it does not provide funding to any religious denomination. The State has recognised the ownership title of the Catholic Church to all its churches built with public funds. It has also declared the places of worship belonging to other religions as exempt from taxation (article 5).<sup>5</sup>

Discrimination on religious grounds is prohibited, and abusing religious, ethnic and other minorities is a criminal offence.

Places of worship are exempt from the land tax if religious groups register with the Ministry of Education and Culture as non-profit entities, and their statutes have been approved by the authorities.

Religious education is not allowed in state schools, but Christian holy days are public holidays. As is the case for workers, students from religious minorities have the right to a leave of absence on the day of their religious observances.

A number of autonomous public bodies, in which various religious and civil society groups are represented, monitor government compliance with non-discrimination regulations. They also organise campaigns promoting greater inclusion of various groups, including the "Together against discrimination" campaign designed to promote religious tolerance.

The Jewish community has reported a rise in anti-Semitic acts in the wake of the conflict in Gaza. This included graffiti in public places as well as violent anti-Israel and Judeophobic statements on social media. The Uruguayan Senate publicly condemned these acts and made an appeal for tolerance. Police successfully investigated such incidents.

The Jewish-Christian Council promotes interfaith understanding, and also involves Afro-Umbandists and Muslims in their religious freedom activities. The government, NGOs and religious leaders are committed to promoting dialogue between different faiths and enhancing understanding and respect for different religious values.<sup>6</sup>

## **Incidents**

In July 2015, Father Pedro Bonavía was attacked as he tried to enter his presbytery. He sustained injuries to his head, one hand and his face. His attackers forced him into his home and stole an envelope that contained money. This was the second attack against the clergyman. In May 2014 five men stormed his church at gunpoint.<sup>7</sup> Members of the Catholic clergy are frequently targeted in criminal acts.

In August 2015, Senator Ivonne Passada said that contributions by the Catholic Church to free state schools – which are allowed to receive donations from the private sector – are totally unfair. Her views were echoed by politicians who would like to see an end to all private donations to schools.<sup>8</sup>

In September 2015, Senator Professor Carmen Asiaín, introduced a bill on freedom of conscience and ideology.<sup>9</sup>

In October 2015, nine non-governmental organisations called on the legislature to ask political Deputies belonging to Evangelical churches to retract a statement they signed pledging to respect the Constitution and laws of the land but only insofar as they did not contradict “the Word of God”.<sup>10</sup>

In December 2015, police detained a Brazilian nun because her presence upset residents of the city of Rivera. She was released once her identity and motive for staying in Uruguay were confirmed. There had been tensions between the Sister, who wanted to set up a school for underprivileged children, and the local bishop, who said the presence of the order did not fit with the diocesan pastoral plan.<sup>11</sup>

In February 2016, a draft by-law issued by Montevideo City Hall approved the Catholic Church’s plans to erect a four-metre high statue of the Virgin Mary near the capital city’s boardwalk. The capital already has public images of Lemanja (or Yemoja, an African goddess) and Confucius, as well as a small square dedicated to Uruguay’s first Ashkenazic Rabbi, Jaime Spector. This started a debate, including among lawmakers, with some coming out in favour of the monument and others expressing opposition.<sup>12</sup>

In March 2016, Gerardo Amarilla, a member of the Evangelical Baptist Church was chosen as Speaker of the House of Representatives. A number of Socialist Party Deputies, including Roberto Chiazzaro, said that the move does not inspire confidence that the state’s secular nature would be maintained and he warned the political sphere could become an arena for proselytising.<sup>13</sup> Uruguay is home to a strong secularist movement which has discriminated against and verbally attacked the Catholic Church and other religious groups.

That same month, in the city of Paysandu, a convert to Islam killed Jewish businessman David Fremd Wulf, 55. Mr Wulf was stabbed in the back several times as he opened his shop. His son who was with him at the time sustained injuries when he tried to defend his father. The killer initially claimed that he was motivated by religious hatred, saying: “I did this because my religion told me to kill a Jew”.<sup>14</sup>

## **Prospects for freedom of religion**

Secularism is one of the characteristics of the Uruguayan State; however, how secular it actually is a topic of public debate. Religious intolerance can occur at a political level as some politicians interpret secularism to mean the total absence of religion from the public arena, leading to them to equate religious practice with proselytising, mistrust openly religious lawmakers, or oppose to religious symbols in public places. In any case, the discussion about the place of religion can also be seen as positive, as it shows religion still plays a vital role in society, whereas previously it was thought that it might disappear from public life.

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- <sup>1</sup> [http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country\\_235\\_2.asp](http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_235_2.asp) accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2016.
  - <sup>2</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-20041847> accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2016.
  - <sup>3</sup> constitutional and democratic republic with presidential government
  - <sup>4</sup> [http://www.ine.gub.uy/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=12d80f63-afe4-4b2c-bf5b-bff6666c0c80&groupId=10181](http://www.ine.gub.uy/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=12d80f63-afe4-4b2c-bf5b-bff6666c0c80&groupId=10181) accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.
  - <sup>5</sup> [http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country\\_235\\_6.asp](http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_235_6.asp) accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.
  - <sup>6</sup> <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238790.pdf> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.
  - <sup>7</sup> <http://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/victimas-mandamiento-crecen-ladrones-iglesias.html> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.
  - <sup>8</sup> <http://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/sturla-no-cortar-patas-liceos-donaciones-iglesia.html> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.
  - <sup>9</sup> <http://amicus-sponsi.blogspot.cl/2015/09/defensa-de-la-libertad-de-conciencia-y.html> accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2016.
  - <sup>10</sup> <http://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/ong-laicas-exigen-diputados-evangelistas.html> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.
  - <sup>11</sup> <http://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/sor-presa-rivera-vino-evangelizar.html> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.
  - <sup>12</sup> <http://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/debate-religion-imagen-virgen-maria.html> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.
  - <sup>13</sup> <http://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/dura-sesion-religion-nuevo-titular.html> accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.
  - <sup>14</sup> <http://analisisdigital.com.ar/noticias.php?ed=1&di=0&no=232936> accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> March 16.