Uruguay

Ethnicity in Uruguay

Group selection

According to the 2011 national census, 90,8% of Uruguayans identify themselves as white, 7,8% as black and 0,5% as indigenous ([5431]).

[5431] [Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2011]

Most political struggles in Uruguay have to do with class rather than with ethnicity. Since the beginning of the XX Century, Uruguay is the Latin American country with the largest European population that, by now, is well integrated with the first wave of migrants. Ethnicity among European immigrants does not play any role. Amerindians are almost non-existent. In the last years, the Uruguayan Indigenous Association was created and the interest in the indigenous past of the country has risen. Still, political participation is not a relevant issue. Therefore, we identify only **Whites/Mestizos** and **Afro-Uruguayans** as politically relevant ethnic groups; ethnicity was not politicized until the 1990s.

Power relations
1989-2021

As early as the 1930s, Afro-Uruguayan leaders tried to form a party, but most group members preferred to vote for the traditional parties. The first Afro-Uruguayan organization, the Asociacion Social and Cultural Uruguay (Social and Cultural Association Uruguay - ASCU), was created in 1941. Of several organizations that were founded in those years, it is the only one that still exists (now under the name Asociacion Social and Cultural Uruguay Negro). Its principal goal consisted in the full participation of Afro-Uruguayans in the newly evolving but rapidly expanding Uruguayan middle class. Even so, at least in the first years after its foundation, it excluded ethnic claims completely from its agenda (entirely in accordance with the general conviction that racial discrimination did not exist in Uruguayan society at that time) and even later focused more on cultural topics. Until 1988, no ethnic groups are considered politically relevant.

In the 1980s, internal conflicts began to become more salient Uruguay and in 1988, a new Afro-Uruguayan organization - the Organizaciones Mundo Afro (World Afro Organizations - Mundo Afro) - was founded by a group of the younger generation. As its name indicates, it is intended to be the umbrella organization of various organizations that promote Afro-Uruguayans rights. It identified

three principal problems faced by the Afro-Uruguayan community: the lack of recognition of Afro-Uruguayan culture and its contribution to the Uruguayan society, racial prejudice and discrimination, and poverty. During the 1990s and the 2000s, Afro Mundo became the most active Afro-Uruguayan organization managing to place its claims successfully on the political agenda.

In 2005, when Tabare Vazquez from the left party Frente Amplio (the same party was the first to introduce anti-discrimination policies on the local level from 2003 on) became president, the Afro-Uruguayan issue was transported to the level of national politics. This led to the creation of several new offices: the Instituto Nacional de la Mujer (National Woman Institute) devoted to Afro-Uruguayan women; the Instituto Nacional de la Juventud (National Youth Institute) devoted to Afro-Uruguayan youth; and the Special Advisor on Afro-descendent issues occupied by one of the founder of Afro Mundo, Romero Rodriguez ([5432], 106-107). "These Afro-Uruguayan spaces in the municipal and federal government are without doubt historic achievements and testimony both to Mundo Afro's negotiating and lobbying skills and its ability to put the question of race on the national political agenda. The ability of these [aforementioned] offices to affect policy, however, is extremely limited" ([5433], 152).

In the legislative period of the Vazquez government also fall the first debates on affirmative action programs. Egardo Ortuno, the first Afro-Uruguayan elected to parliament, "made great efforts to increase general awareness of and pride in the country's African ancestry and cultural heritage. As a result of the work of Afro-Uruguayan artists, intellectuals, and grassroots organizations, racial discrimination is now at least recognized and debated by an increasing number of Uruguayans. However, it continues: according to human rights reports, racism inhibits the advancement of Uruguayans of African descent in school and in the labour force; the majority of Afro-Uruguayans continue to make up the poorest strata of national society" ([5434]).

In 2013, affirmative action legislation was enacted establishing a quota of Afro-Uruguayans of 8% for state jobs, requiring that future student support programs and scholarships include quota and granting financial incentives for companies that hire Afro-Uruguayans. Further actions included the appointment of an ambassador-at-large for Afro Affairs, the creation of a follow-up commission to eradicate discrimination and racism and the removal of discriminatory expressions from Uruguay's dictionary ([5435]). In July 2019, the Ministry of Social Development introduced a National Plan for Racial Equality for the 2019-22 period, which includes funding for projects on Afro-descendant culture and society, discrimination awareness training in various state institutions and reviews of police procedures ([5436]).

Despite these intensified efforts, Afro-Uruguayans still face considerable structural racism ([5437]: 16, [5438]). The 8% quota for state-jobs has contrasted with the real indicator of only 2,7% in 2015 ([5439]: 17), and the quota still has not been reached ([5440]). Still there are

[5432] [Andrews, 2010]

[5433] [Andrews, 2010]

[5434] [Minority Rights Group International, 2014]

[5435] [USDS, 2013]

[5436] [USDS, 2019]

[5437] [USDS, 2016]
[5438] [USDS, 2019]
[5439] [USDS, 2016]
[5440] [USDS, 2019]

no Afro-Uruguayan persons holding office in executive government positions ([5441]: 16), although two Afro-Uruguayans were elected into Parliament in October 2019 (including the first Afro-Uruguayan to serve in the Senate) ([5442]). Therefore, Afro-Uruguayans are considered "powerless", while whites/mestizos hold a monopoly on political power.

[5441] [USDS, 2016]

[5442] [USDS, 2019]

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Political status of ethnic groups in U

From 1946 until 1988

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Whites/mestizos	0.908	IRRELEVANT

From 1989 until 2021

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Whites/mestizos	0.908	MONOPOLY
Afro-Uruguayans	0.078	POWERLESS

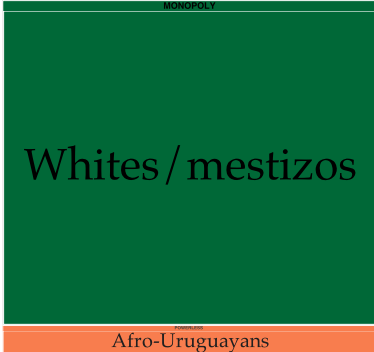Figure 1100: Political status of ethnic groups in Uruguay during 1946-1988.

Figure 1101: Political status of ethnic groups in Uruguay during 1989-2021.

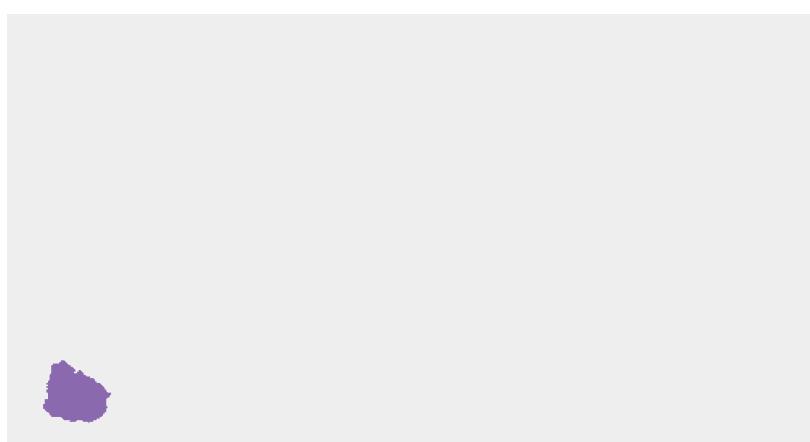# Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Uruguay

From 1989 until 2021

Figure 1102: Map of ethnic groups in Uruguay during 1989-2021.

	Group name	Area in km^2	Type
■	Whites/mestizos	177 853	Statewide
■	Afro-Uruguayans	0	Urban

Table 401: List of ethnic groups in Uruguay during 1989-2021.

Conflicts in Uruguay

Starting on 1970-04-12

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Uruguay	MLN/Tupamaros		1970-04-12			